



LITTLE LADY GINTON



BY
FRANK BARRETT.





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LITTLE LADY LINTON.

A Novel.

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

AUTHOR OF 'FOLLY MORRISON,' 'HONEST DAVIE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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LITTLE LADY LINTON.

CHAPTER I.

MESSRS. PIERCE AND PIERCE.

‘**W**ELL, here’s my place of business.
You’ll know where to find me
when you want me.’

“Third floor — Pierce and Pierce.”
Who is the other Pierce, Bob ?

‘My partner.’

‘One of the mysterious unknown who
have figured as “Co.” in former enterprises,
I suspect. What are you now ?’

Mr. Pierce dropped his voice and murmured in his friend's ear :

‘ Private inquiry agents, if you please.’

‘ A private inquiry agent—you ? Ho, ho ! You don't mind my laughing ?’

‘ Not at all ; I'm tolerably inured to it ; but I should like to know where the point of the joke is.’

‘ Hang it, Bob ! one can understand your being an agent for coals, sewing-machines, mineral waters, knife-cleaners, or even a theatrical agent ; but it's past comprehension that a man like you could think of being a private inquirer—something between a plain-clothes policeman and an earwig ! Certainly you might make any number of private inquiries without leading anyone to suspect that you were employed for that purpose ; for, to tell you the truth, Pierce, you look more like an alderman than a spy.’

‘I should prefer to be an alderman; but circumstances give me no choice in the matter. A moneyless man must do something for his living, unfortunately. No one would have me for a clerk if he had any business-principles whatever; I can’t constitute myself director of a flourishing company, and I have not sufficient cash to open a chandler’s shop. Here I have a snug little office at ten shillings a week, where I can sit and read my newspaper without the slightest worry or interruption.’

‘But suppose anyone is rash enough to employ you in a case that requires active investigation?’

‘I shall still sit in my office and read my newspaper.’

‘But your case?—for I know you well enough to believe that you would deceive nobody——’

‘ Except in the way of business.’

‘ I mean nobody who employed you. Well, how would you act fairly to him and sit eternally in your office with your everlasting newspaper ?’

‘ Oh, the eavesdropping, the poking and prying part of the business is conducted by the other Pierce !’

‘ Then you really have a partner ?’

‘ Undoubtedly ; and, if you asked me the origin of my partner’s species, I should answer, without the slightest hesitation—ferrets. To a man like me, who loves peace and quiet beyond most things, who loves to read his newspaper without being bothered, and to come and go and do just what he pleases without question or interference, it would be, as you may imagine, a great blessing to be entrusted with an investigation that should occupy a restless inquisitive partner wholly.’

‘Undoubtedly. Is there any hope of your getting such employment for him?’

‘I think there is. By-the-bye, I must put my pipe out. I expect my client—client, my boy!—at ten, and it won’t do to be caught gossiping in the street with a pipe in my mouth. Come up to my office if you have nothing better to do for a quarter of an hour, and I’ll give you the outline of the case—it’s a rather curious one. But you must put your pipe out, you know.’

Mr. Pierce went up to his office on the third floor, followed by his friend; and, when he had put on a pair of easy slippers, and both were seated, he said:

‘We will begin at the beginning; read that.’

He handed a letter taken from a bundle which he had brought out of the capacious pocket of his coat. The communication, written in a feminine hand, ran as follows:

‘Having seen your advertisements in the morning papers, I should be glad to know upon what terms you undertake investigations. Address, “Anon., Post-office, Waltham Green.”’

‘I replied, saying that our terms depended upon the nature of the work and the amount of it to be done; and at the same time requested that she—our client is a lady—would call upon me, or lay her case as clearly as possible before me in a letter. Two days later I received this.’

Mr. Pierce handed his friend a second letter.

The following is the statement of facts you require. As I am unacquainted with any person who has had transactions with you, and wish to commit myself to nothing at this stage of our negotiations, I have

given imaginary names to the persons concerned :

‘ At the age of twenty-six my daughter married a person of title and considerable wealth. For the first two years my daughter lived in London and at her husband’s country seat. I have no reason to think that my child was ill-used during this time, although her husband was a man of the world, with a temper at times sardonic, at times violent, as I had more than once occasion to remark. At the end of two years Sir Charles went abroad, taking my daughter with him; and I have letters to prove that he was at this time unreasonably suspicious, exacting, and self-willed. They were abroad twelve months, and then returned to England, but not to London. In express opposition to my daughter’s wish and my entreaties, Sir Charles gave up his town house and in-

sisted upon residing in the country, where my daughter suffered physically and mentally. The house was old, and, in the winter, damp, and the society was unbearable. My daughter had been used to indulgence, to life, and the excitement of the season. I can produce forty-three letters, written to me in the space of a year, to show that Sir Charles treated his wife with absolute barbarity. He would not listen to her wishes, nor, I may add, would he listen to my prayers. Indeed, his behaviour to me became so intolerable that my visits at his house became shorter and more remote every time, until they finally ceased altogether. My daughter, however, did not fail to correspond regularly; and in the following year, the fourth of her married life, she complained bitterly of her husband's neglect, and of the surveillance under which she was placed in his absence. It was clear

to me that my daughter could not exist in this deplorable condition, and that either she would put an end to her life or leave her husband. She had begged me to procure a legal separation, but my solicitor informed me that this was impracticable. In the autumn of the fourth year my daughter disappeared. The fact was made known to me through Sir Charles's solicitor. A boat taken from the boat-house was found upset below the weir, but no trace of my daughter could be discovered. No one believed she had committed suicide, for she had taken with her a maid-servant and all her jewels. It was concluded that she had used the boat to cross the river, and then suffered it to go down with the current. This was my own conclusion. After this, I naturally expected to see my daughter, or at least to receive a message or a letter from her. But no message came, and I then

began to suspect the truth. My suspicions were verified in the spring. In February I was summoned to —, where a quantity of hair, some fragments of clothing, and some jewellery were shown me. I identified them at once as appertaining to my dear daughter. These remains, with others unrecognisable, had been discovered under water in repairing the empty boat-house. I saw at once that Sir Charles had murdered his wife; and at the inquest I produced my child's letters, and described fully the barbarous treatment to which he had subjected her. He made no denial of my charge, he offered no explanation of the way by which his wife had come by her death, and he was committed to take his trial at the assizes. The prosecution was shamefully lenient to Sir Charles. Instead of representing my child as the blameless and suffering angel she was, the Queen's Counsel tacitly ad-

mitted that she had misconducted herself and given Sir Charles ample cause to regret his marriage. My solicitor tried to convince me that this course was unavoidable, since, supposing Sir Charles to be in his senses, a motive for the murder must be admitted; he further added that no jury would hang a man of title on presumptive evidence, and that the utmost the Crown could do was to cast strong suspicion on Sir Charles and debar him from holding an honourable position in society for the future. My letters were scarcely referred to, and in the witness-box I was grossly insulted. No direct evidence against Sir Charles was found; and it was merely suggested that, having followed his wife to the boat-house, he had there, tempted by opportunity, or provoked by her refusal to return with him to the house, thrust her into the water and suffered her to drown. The jury returned

a verdict of "Not guilty"—here Mr. Pierce's friend gave a grunt of approval. 'But,' the letter proceeded, 'I am thoroughly convinced that this verdict could not have been returned had a searching inquiry been made into Sir Charles's relations with the servants, who were undoubtedly bribed to withhold evidence. It is this investigation which I will have made, if the cost of making it is within my means.'

'She doesn't say what became of the maid-servant who left with her daughter.'

'Oh, she disappeared—with the major part of her mistress's jewels!'

'Just what I expected. Of course she did it.'

'Don't be hasty; you haven't heard the other side. I wrote to my client, asking for particulars as to Sir Charles's defence. Here's her reply.'

Mr. Pierce's friend read :

‘The counsel for the defence charged my daughter with insobriety and a clandestine acquaintance with James Burton, Sir Charles's discharged valet, who is said to have been at the same time secretly courting my daughter's maid. With regard to insobriety, our family doctor declared that it was a disease which should have elicited her husband's sympathy and pity rather than his malevolent anger. As to the clandestine acquaintance, I do not believe one word of it.’

‘Do you believe a word of it, Bob?’

‘Oh, it was proved at the trial!’

‘How do you know that?’

Mr. Pierce chuckled quietly.

‘My correspondent's vanity did it,’ said he. ‘You can see she is as proud as a peacock, and could not conceal the fact that

she had married her daughter to a man of title. My partner at once recollected the case of a baronet being tried for murder, and of a boat being found at the foot of a weir. A few hours spent with a file of newspapers put us in possession of all the particulars my client mentions, and many others she had passed over. It was proved that the lady was afflicted with dipsomania before her marriage, and that the fact had been carefully concealed by her mother—it was on this point that the lady received the gross insults in the witness-box of which she complains in her letter. It was proved that her husband was compelled to withdraw her from society, and that he took her abroad at the advice of a physician, with the hope of curing her. It was proved that she grew worse instead of better, and had to be put under paid keepers. It was proved that she eluded their vigilance and

carried on a clandestine acquaintance with Sir Charles's valet, who was dismissed on that account. It was proved that the lady's-maid was at the same time secretly courted by this man-servant. It was proved that, the day before the lady's death, she received through her maid a letter from the discharged man-servant ; and it was proved that the man and the maid were together, and took the train to London the morning after the lady's flight from her husband's house, and that they carried a box, which they would not trust to the man who took their portmanteau from the hotel to the station.'

'Oh, the case doesn't admit of doubt ! Your client must be mad to think of overturning a verdict based upon such evidence as that.'

'I dare say she is mad,' said Mr. Pierce, with another chuckle. 'I see her position

pretty clearly. She marries her daughter to a baronet, and becomes at once a kind of triton amongst her middle-class minnows. Then comes this revelation, which covers her daughter with disgrace, and her also, and all through her own precious cleverness at the inquest. But for her evidence, there would have been a simple verdict of "found drowned," in all probability. To save his wife's name from disgrace, Sir Charles said nothing about her propensities or this unpleasant acquaintance with his valet until he was compelled to do so.'

'That shows he was a gentleman. Of course, if you take up this case, you can't expect to prove Sir Charles guilty.'

'I am not so sure of that.'

'What! You think he is guilty?'

'Of complicity, perhaps.'

'But there's not a tittle of evidence against him.'

‘ There it is. You may fairly doubt the justice of any verdict that is returned for want of evidence on the other side. Ha !’

A gong upon the door in the outer office sounded, and Mr. Pierce rose from his chair.

‘ There’s my client,’ said he. ‘ You must go.’

‘ I wish you luck, Bob. Good-bye!’



CHAPTER II.

MRS. GOWER.

MR. PIERCE closed the door of the outer office upon his friend, and turned to the lady who waited by the little mahogany counter.

‘Ah, this is the office of Messrs. Pierce and Pierce, I believe?’ she said.

‘It is, ma’am. My name is Pierce.’

‘Ah, indeed!’ She unfolded a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, and, holding them with great delicacy a few inches from her eyes, examined Mr. Pierce with the cool audacity of a very superior super-genteel

person ; whilst he, with his knuckle on the little counter, looked over the top of his glasses at her with the stolidity of a naturally phlegmatic man.

She was well dressed, tall, very erect, and about fifty. Her features might have served Mr. du Maurier as a model for his duchess. They were features with a good deal of character in them—unpleasant character, as it seemed to Mr. Pierce. She spoke with severe distinctness, and, having spoken, drew back her lips tightly upon her perfect teeth, giving to her face the semblance of a smile which seemed much at variance with the expression of her eyes ; for her eyebrows were raised in pained astonishment, and she looked anything but pleased with the aspect of Mr. Pierce.

In truth, his appearance was enough to disappoint anyone about to entrust him with an enterprise requiring shrewdness

and quick address. He was large and heavy, with the patient ox-like expression of an unsuccessful man. There was a slipshod air about him, and a distinct odour of last night's birds'-eye. His dress was unbusiness-like. Half of his ill-folded newspaper stuck out of one pocket, and two-thirds of an old bandanna hung out of the other ; and he seemed not at all conscious of his utter commonplaceness and very inferior condition.

The lady lowered her glasses and said :

‘ I have written to you, signing myself anonymously. You received my letter yesterday ?’

‘ Yes, ma’am. If you will walk into my office, we can talk without fear of interruption. This way, if you please.’

Mr. Pierce opened the inner door.

The lady hesitated, as if she regretted

having had anything to do with Mr. Pierce ; however, there was no going back at this point, so she entered the inner office. There was nothing in the look of this small room to promote confidence. Looking about her deliberately, she observed that, while the two armchairs had the air of being extensively sat upon, there was a thick stratum of dust upon the stool before the desk. Mr. Pierce placed a chair for her, and with difficulty poised himself upon the stool.

‘I should like to know if you are the principal of this firm ?’ said she.

‘I am the senior partner and head of the business,’ he replied.

‘Thank you. I do not wish to waste your time or my own, Mr. Pierce ; we will therefore come to the point at once.’

‘She wants to get out of it,’ thought Mr. Pierce. ‘Like my luck !’

‘ You have taken three weeks to consider the subject of our correspondence.’

‘ Yes, ma’am ; we do nothing in a hurry.’

‘ Obviously ; and you have arrived at a conclusion ?’

‘ Yes. We are prepared to make the investigation, and to begin at once.’

‘ Just so. Be good enough to tell me now, if you please, at what price you value your services.’

‘ It will cost you two guineas a day.’

‘ For how long ?’

‘ Until the guilt or innocence of the party suspected is proved to your satisfaction.’

The lady smiled ; there was something quite too ridiculous in Mr. Pierce’s proposal.

‘ That is to say,’ said she, ‘ the inquiry is to be protracted indefinitely at my expense.’

‘ I shouldn’t advise you to have it ex-

tended beyond six months. If nothing is discovered by that time, nothing will ever be discovered.'

'I am afraid the result would not be worth the expense.' The lady rose from her seat. 'I must, therefore, decline to go any further with this investigation, Mr. Pierce.' With the slightest perceptible inclination of the head, she turned towards the door.

Mr. Pierce slipped off his stool with an air of resignation, and, going to open the door for his escaping client, murmured :

'So much the better for Sir Gilbert.'

'Sir Gilbert!' exclaimed the lady, stopping abruptly and turning towards Mr. Pierce. 'How did you come into possession of that name?'

'Do you suppose I should take up a case, knowing no more about it than you told me in your letter, Mrs. Gower?'

‘How long have you known my name?’

‘Only within the last three weeks.’

‘And—and what do you know of this case?’

‘Sufficient to warrant me in offering my services on your side. This private inquiry business is not a very exalted kind of thing—not the sort of work a gentleman would take to, if he could help it; nor the occupation that any decent man would devote himself to without a pretty strong conviction that he could get his living honestly by it.’

‘Then you believe Sir Gilbert is guilty?’

‘I believe that he is not guiltless. I am tolerably certain he had a stronger motive for wishing his wife out of the way than the counsel for the prosecution discovered.’

Mr. Pierce spoke with his hand resting on the handle of the door. Mrs. Gower, after regarding him without the aid of her glasses for a couple of moments in silent

surprise, quietly turned to the chair she had left, and re-seated herself. Mr. Pierce, instead of returning to his desk, dropped, by force of habit, into the armchair that faced her.

‘What motive had he?’ she asked.

Mr. Pierce did not reply directly ; he seemed to calculate for a brief space how far he should play his fish before striking.

‘Do you know that Sir Gilbert has given up the Abbey?’ he presently inquired.

‘I heard that he had left Monkden. No one would miss him.’

‘Do you know that he has taken a second wife?’

‘Sir Gilbert married again, and not a year since my dear Griselda was alive?’

Mr. Pierce nodded.

‘To whom? What is the creature’s name? How long has he known her?’

‘Her name is now Lady Linton. He

made her acquaintance about five or six months before your daughter was drowned.'

'That is precisely what I suspected!' cried Mrs. Gower, in great excitement. 'I was certain of it. I said to my husband again and again, "There is another woman at the bottom of this."'

'That reminds me, ma'am. If this investigation is to be proceeded with, absolute secrecy is necessary. Above all things, Mr. Gower must suspect nothing of your knowledge.'

'Why?'

'Because Mr. Gower is in frequent communication with Sir Gilbert Linton, and is not only his friend, but also, I believe, an old acquaintance of the present Lady Linton.'

'Oh, the infamous man, the monster, the wicked base creature! Why did I ever marry him?'

‘Ah!’ Mr. Pierce made a little gesture which signified that this question was one open to a good deal of private inquiry.

‘Go on, Mr. Pierce ; do not regard my emotion ; tell me all ; let me know everything.’

Here Mr. Pierce thought that the time had come to strike.

‘As you may suppose, ma’am,’ said he, rising and thrusting his hands in his pockets, ‘this knowledge has not been acquired without a good deal of trouble and expense on our part. If the investigation ends here, I shall be a loser. That is my affair. One must speculate in every business. I have given you sufficient proof, I think, that we are neither stupid nor dishonest. If you still think the result of our inquiries will be not worth the cost, you are at liberty to withdraw at once ; but, if you desire to know anything further from me

concerning Sir Gilbert Linton and Lady Linton—and your husband—you must sign this little memorandum of agreement, empowering us to carry on inquiries in your behalf at a payment of two guineas per diem for a space not exceeding six months from the present date.’

Saying this, Mr. Pierce pulled out the bundle of letters from his pocket, and, after opening half a dozen envelopes, at length found the copy of agreement, which he handed over to the lady.

Mrs. Gower read the form of agreement through, and sat for some moments in silent reflection, tapping the paper with the edge of her glasses.

‘It is not a trifling sum that I may be compelled to pay,’ she said at length. ‘Before signing this agreement, I ought to have a more defined prospect of success. The facts—if they are facts—which you

have produced, may be all that you can obtain.'

'Oh yes!' murmured Mr. Pierce thoughtfully, looking up at the ceiling over his spectacles; 'I think you're right there! It's a fair suggestion. Do you think, ma'am,' he proceeded, turning his glance down to his client—'do you think a man could keep a secret from his wife?'

'Not if she wished to know it,' answered Mrs. Gower sharply.

'And there are very few secrets that a wife doesn't want to know, generally speaking,' said Mr. Pierce, with a chuckle. 'Now Mr. Gower was a widower when you married him. Do you think, if he was suspected of having murdered his first wife, you would not have found out the truth very soon after your marriage? This is merely a suggestion to prove the case.'

'Of course I should.'

‘ You think that any woman, living constantly with her husband and on affectionate terms with him, would in the course of a few months discover whether the charge against him was true or false ?’

After considering the question for a minute, Mrs. Gower replied :

‘ Yes ; I think that any woman with ordinary common-sense would discover that—after marriage certainly, if not before.’

‘ Then I fancy I can give you some assurance of discovering more facts than I have already produced.’

Saying this, Mr. Pierce had recourse once more to the bundle of letters in his pocket, and, taking out a bulky packet, he held it up and said :

‘ This, ma’am, contains a faithful copy of the present Lady Linton’s diary, as I am given to understand. As yet I have but just glanced at it, for it only came to me by

this morning's post. It is not the whole of the diary, nor anything like the whole. Apparently it begins at the date of the lady's first meeting with Sir Gilbert. But I am assured that the diary contains a complete record of the writer's experiences and reflections up to the present day. I may tell you that my partner is now residing with Sir Gilbert and his wife, and has access to Lady Linton's diary.' Mr. Pierce looked at his slippers, as if he were rather ashamed of his partner. 'The opportunities of seeing the diary and copying from it are naturally few and brief—an hour or two each day is about the average; but we may reasonably expect to get the whole of it in time. I am told that there are facts relating to Mr. Gower which will be of great interest to you.'

'You will let me read that and what follows?' Mrs. Gower asked eagerly.

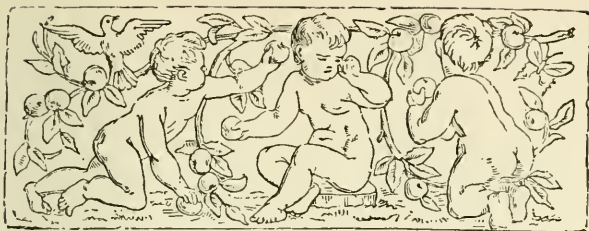
‘Certainly. I will give you this packet the moment you have signed the agreement.’

‘Give me a pen.’

With some difficulty Mr. Pierce found ink that would flow and a pen that would write, and, having brushed the desk with his coat-sleeve, invited Mrs. Gower to put her name to the agreement. This she did, and then, handing the paper to Mr. Pierce, said :

‘Now give me that woman’s diary.’

Mr. Pierce handed her the packet.



CHAPTER III.

THE DIARY.

THERE were some women washing at the lavoir. I asked them if they knew where I should find the English fishermen belonging to the boat that lay in the harbour. They all ceased beating their linen to look at my dress and hear what I had to say ; and one of them, leaving her work, conducted me to the end of the little street, and pointing along the sea-wall to the angle where a man was seated upon a piece of timber, said that he was one of them. I thanked

her and walked along the wall, which here was sheltered from the wind by a row of houses, so that one could look about and enjoy the strange and beautiful scene, which was strange indeed to me, who had never before seen the sea. The wind seemed to have swept away all impurity from the air, the sun made nothing of the white clouds that crossed his path ; everything was surprisingly brilliant, and stood out clear and bold before the eye—the cliffs, the great rocks detached from them, the birds skimming over the water, and some boats with yellow and brown sails. The line where the sea met the sky looked quite near, so that it perplexed me for a while to see the surface there so blue and still, while, but a little nearer, it was all of a blustering hurly-burly, and yellow from the sand torn up from the shore. It made me giddy to peep over the breastwork at the great waves that

bounced inward and raced along by the wall, curling over in a lengthening streak of white foam as they ran until their strength was exhausted, and they swirled back to meet others, and be licked in and dashed up in feathery spray. But I did not pay very much attention to the sea just then, except to keep closer by the houses when a wave stronger than the rest came spluttering up the wall and leapt over the breastwork into the road, for my thoughts were chiefly concerned with the Englishman and my business with him. First of all, I was astonished by the great size of him, and next by his hardihood in choosing to sit upon the most exposed point there was, for no particular reason that I could perceive, except to be swept by the violent wind and the spray from the waves that dashed against the angle of the wall. It was unreasonable to suppose that a fisher-

man would resemble my dear father, who was a scholar and a suffering invalid ; yet, through seeing no Englishmen but him—except the artist who came to Neufbourg a long while ago, who was a thin, miserable-looking creature, and afraid to cross the stream for fear of slipping off the rocks into the water—I had come to think that all Englishmen must be delicate of complexion and feature, slight of form, and subject to take cold. My preconceptions are nearly always wrong ; but this was stupidly wrong, because I myself, although neither so stout nor so robust as many girls at Neufbourg, am not puny or feeble, and I have read in many books of my countrymen's great strength and endurance.

When I reached the end house, the noise of the waves and the violence of the wind so terrified me that I dared not venture to leave the shelter of the building, and stood

there, calling to the man as loudly as I could, and gesticulating with my arms ; but he took no notice of me, for the noise of the waters was far louder than my voice, and, though his profile was partly towards me, he did not catch sight of my arms, for his eyes were half closed, and his gaze fixed stolidly upon the horizon. He was not an ill-looking man ; his features were large but nicely proportioned, his eyes were deeply sunk, his nose was straight, his skin was fair where the sun and wind had not tanned it, and he had a short beard and moustache, the colour of straw, and fringed with beads of water that sparkled in the sunlight. He wore a yellow oilskin cap and coat, and a pair of great rough leather boots that came up over his trousers. I had plenty of time to notice these peculiarities as I stood at the corner screaming at him and waving my handkerchief. He

had not an unpleasant expression on his face, but he exasperated me by sitting there smoking his empty pipe, with his arms folded on his chest, and seeming to enjoy the wind and the noise, while I was making myself hoarse and doing my utmost to attract his attention. This made me forget my danger, and I presently stepped out of the shelter and made towards him ; but a gust caught me with such force that I nearly lost my footing, and when I opened my mouth to cry out, the wind got in and stopped my breathing. I threw my whole weight forward, yet I could not advance for a minute ; then, the gust suddenly subsiding, I dashed forward, and came upon the man with a bounce as the pent-up sound burst from my mouth.

‘ Fisherman !’ I cried.

‘ Well, what do you want with the fisherman ?’ he asked, having looked at me with

some surprise as I clasped my bonnet with my hands.

‘If you’ll come out of the wind, I’ll tell you,’ I attempted to shout ; but the gust had returned, and, before the sentence was half over, my voice was silenced ; and then, as I stooped down to gather my petticoats together—for they were twirling about my legs horridly—the wind caught hold of my bonnet and carried it off my head, first upwards towards the roofs of the houses, and then away out to sea. It might have carried me away also if the man had not laid hold of me. He rose from his seat and led me away, holding my arm so firmly that I could move neither to the right nor to the left, but went in a straight line to the shelter of the houses—just as if I were being guided by a great piece of machinery.

‘What on earth did you go out there for ?’ he asked savagely, as he left go of my

arm. 'Don't you know that you might have been swept into the sea like the thing you had on your head ?'

'Then why on earth do you sit out there ?' I retorted viciously, for I was enraged by the loss of my bonnet and with being scolded for my misfortunes by him. 'As for the thing I had on my head,' I added, choking with impatience, 'it cost me fifteen francs at Bayeux this morning.'

He began to laugh ; but, seeing the tears come into my eyes—for I could not restrain them, my temper having got the better of me—he became grave, and said in a low voice :

'I am sorry you lost your bonnet. Let me tie this handkerchief over your head.'

'No, thank you,' said I very coldly, though feeling at the same time that it was very kind of him to make the offer ; 'I can

do quite well without it ;' which was true, for, except on fête days, I never wore any covering for my head after putting my winter capeline aside.

'So much the better,' said he ; 'you look better without it ;' and he put the handkerchief back in his pocket.

I took no notice of this compliment ; indeed, I do not think he intended to compliment me, for he spoke in a plain matter-of-fact manner, without any of the polite accent and grace a Frenchman would have employed.

'Do you belong to the English ship—I don't know what its name is—that is floating in the harbour ?'

'Yes, I do. It's a "she," and her name is the *Tub*.'

He spoke now in a tone of playful familiarity, which might have been excusable had I been a child or he an old

man, but which—as he was less than forty and I was in my twentieth year—seemed to me an impertinence only attributable to that want of good manners for which abroad Englishmen are famous.

‘Are you the master of the *Tub*?’ I asked, looking as severe as I could.

He nodded, keeping his blue eyes fixed upon my face.

‘When do you leave here?’

‘As soon as my crew return from Bayeux, whither they have gone to get fresh meat for their captain’s table. They should be back now. Shall we walk that way and see? It may gratify your curiosity to examine the *Tub*’s internal economy.’

‘I want to go in your ship,’ I said, taking that side of the path nearest the houses, as he stepped into the road and turned towards the harbour; ‘but first I must know how much you will charge to take me and my

bonne to England and bring my bonne back here.'

He stopped abruptly, and, looking at me in amazement, said :

'Good heaven ! what do you mean ?'

'I have told you,' I replied, with some impatience. 'I want to know how much you will charge to take me to England.'

'I'm not a steam-navigation company,' said he, laughing.

'My bonne will not go in a steam-vessel ; that is why we have come here. However, if you don't choose to take us, we can find another fisherman who will, no doubt.'

I heartily wished I had not sought this man, for I saw that Mère Lucas's prejudice made us appear ridiculous even to this common fisherman. I made a stiff little bow, and was turning away, when he said :

'Don't be impatient. I haven't refused to take you. The *Tub's* a better boat than

any in this precious hole, and I think I am as good as any other fisherman you may find here.'

'That's why I asked you to take us.'

'Thank you. I should like to know something more about you. Where's your *bonne*?'

'In the first of those little houses over there, beyond the harbour.'

'Is that your residence?'

'Oh no! We have come from Neufbourg—that is ever so far away. We have been two days coming from there.'

'By train?'

'No. There is no railway near Neufbourg—not for fifteen leagues; and Mère Lucas is afraid of steam-engines.'

'Who's Mère Lucas?'

'My *bonne*.'

'She is not a young thing like you, then?'

‘No; she is an old woman.’

‘Ah, I’m glad to hear it! I was afraid you were a pair of harum-scarum young runaways who had escaped from a school or a religious house, or something of that kind.’

He glanced at me sidelong in a suspicious manner, as if to see whether this had made any effect upon me.

‘You made a great mistake,’ I said sharply.

‘You are English, of course?’

‘My father and mother were English; but I was born at Neufbourg, and have lived there all my life.’

‘Have you never been to England?’

‘I have never been more than ten leagues from Neufbourg. This is the first time I have spoken English to anyone except my father. My mother died before I could speak.’

‘Good heaven ! And has your father suffered you—that is’—he corrected himself quickly, seeing perhaps a sign in my face of the pain in my heart, and connecting that with my mourning dress—‘have your friends in Neufbourg suffered you to make this journey with no protection but your *bonne*?’

‘They are very good, my friends Madame Piquois and Monsieur l’Abbé ; but Madame Piquois has Jeanne to attend to, and her husband and her house ; and Monsieur l’Abbé has his church ; and, after all, there is no very great need of protection in France ; and I shall have to do without it in England.’

‘Have you no friends there?’

‘Not one.’

‘Then you are absolutely alone?’

‘I shall be when Mère Lucas leaves me.’

‘What are you going to do in England?’

‘I am going to London to sell my father’s book.’

‘Your father was a literary man. What was his name?’

‘Graham. He wrote for the *Anthropologist*.’

‘I don’t think I have ever seen that work.’

‘Very likely not. It has nothing to do with fish. It is a philosophical magazine.’

‘That is not exactly in my way, to be sure,’ he said, smiling a little. ‘Is the book you are going to sell of an anthropological kind?’

‘It is a cosmographical dictionary. It is a very great work. My dear father has spent years and years upon it; and he died the very day it was finished. ’Twas for me he wrote it, poor dear! and the thought of providing for me sustained him.’

· He asked no further questions; and we

walked along, side-by-side, in silence. I do not know quite how it was I had come to tell him so much, he being a stranger and a fisherman. I fancy the tone of equality and authority he assumed had something to do with it.

We had come to the harbour. A man was on board, doing something with the ropes.

‘After all,’ said the Captain, as we drew near his ship, speaking as if in reply to some argument that had been going on in his mind, ‘I don’t think you can do better than cross the Channel in the *Tub*.’

‘You have not answered my inquiry as to the price,’ said I.

‘Oh, we’ll arrange that presently!’ he replied; and then he called out to the man on board, who touched his hat in response; and a dialogue ensued which concerned the stores in the ship, and the tide, and the

wind, and matters which I did not understand—made more difficult even to guess at by the curious dialect and nasal intonation of the man, which differed entirely from the master's. But this I was not surprised at, for there must be in England different dialects, as there are in France. At the fair of St. Denis I have listened to the conversation of peasants who have brought horses from Brittany without understanding one word; and, indeed, these fishermen of Calvados spoke quite another patois from our peasants of La Manche.

‘Come,’ said the master, turning to me quickly, when the dialogue with his man was finished, ‘we must settle matters with your *bonne* at once. The tide is on the turn, and if we are not off in an hour, we shan’t start to-day.’

I now felt anxious not to lose the chance of going in the English ship; for, while the

master and man were talking, I had been comparing the *Tub* and her crew with the French boats and their fishermen; and the latter appeared by contrast so unpleasant and dirty that I dreaded the possibility of journeying with them. And so we hurried along towards the cottages—that is to say, I hurried, for John Brown, which was, I found afterwards, the name of the *Tub's* captain—was such a giant that he had but to saunter along to keep pace with my quickest steps.

‘How is it your *bonne* let you come in search of me alone? That’s rather contrary to French etiquette, isn’t it?’ he asked.

‘I dare say she thinks I am in the little garden behind the cottage. She was too deeply engaged in quarrelling with her sister to pay much attention to me.’

‘There’s a family quarrel going forward --eh?’

‘Mère Lucas wanted her brother-in-law to scrub his boat clean for us, and he wouldn’t.’

‘It would be a long job, and a troublesome one, if his boat is in the same condition as the majority of the boats here.’

‘And he made all kinds of excuses to get us to go by steamer from Havre to Cherbourg.’

‘That’s not an unreasonable suggestion.’

‘But Mère Lucas had made up her mind that we shouldn’t go by steamer, which she says is neither safe nor respectable ; and when she makes up her mind not to do a thing, I don’t know any argument that could induce her to do it.’

‘Oh, that’s the sort of old lady she is!’

‘Most old people at Neufbourg are like that. But she has some reason to be angry, for her sister and brother-in-law came to see her last summer, and were so clean and

nice that she lent them a hundred francs to buy sails with; and then they promised that if ever she should have need of the *Marie*—that's the name of their ship—it should be at her disposal. Of course they didn't expect that Mère Lucas would ever want to make a voyage; but that makes no difference—they promised, and were very nice and pleasant when they wanted her money; and now that she wants their boat, they're very sullen, and dirty, and disagreeable.'

'I suppose he suggested that my boat would be more suitable?'

'He did—that is why I came to see about you. I only hope that Mère Lucas has not made up her mind not to go in your boat.'

'I don't see why you should be guided by your servant.'

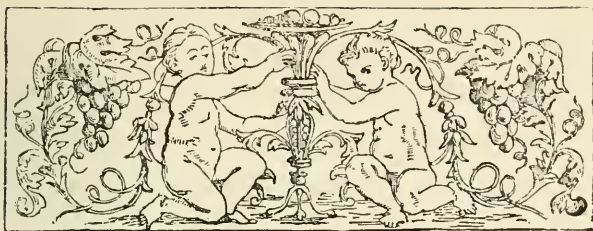
'You don't know what a friend she has

been to me. I think our peasant women look upon it as a kind of disgrace to leave their villages ; and I am sure Mère Lucas would have undertaken such a formidable voyage as this for no one on earth but me. She has prided herself on having brought me up from my infancy without reproach, and it has pleased her to think she has made a sacrifice to save me from expense and to conduct me in safety to England, as being the utmost it is in her power to do. If, after all, she is compelled to take me by the steamer, as Monsieur l'Abbé advised, she will feel sadly humiliated.'

'Then perhaps she will not decline a berth in the *Tub*.'

By this time we had come to the door of the cottage. The brother-in-law had left the cottage, and, at some distance from it, was lounging against a post, with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth.

Mère Lucas and her sister were still at high words ; but their quarrels had arrived at the weeping-stage, and the invectives of both women were interspersed with sobs.



CHAPTER IV.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE SETS SAIL FOR ENGLAND.

MÈRE LUCAS was so exhausted with contention that she had but little strength to oppose my proposal that we should make the voyage in the English boat. Still, as it involved a great sacrifice of self-esteem not to have her own way, she did not concede without considerable demur. She would not understand John Brown, though he took great pains to speak distinctly and loudly, and his accent only was bad. She said she did not understand his patois, and made me translate all he had to say.

‘Tell her,’ said John Brown impatiently — ‘tell her that Hercules himself couldn’t clean out one of those French smacks, nor she either.’

I did not tell her that, for she would not have understood the reference to Hercules, and she could not believe anything impossible which she undertook. But I persuaded her to look at the *Tub* before declining John Brown’s offer. She insisted first on knowing the price to be paid.

‘Oh, anything she likes! Ten francs!’ he said, roughly extending the fingers of both hands.

Even Mère Lucas could not think this price extortionate ; but, as a good Norman, she accepted it with an air of protesting resignation, drawing down the corners of her lips and shrugging her shoulders, as I had seen her do so often at market in purchasing butter a sous under the market

price. We went together to the boat, and, when she had nearly exhausted John Brown's patience by her many objections, she told him he might go up to her sister's house and fetch my boxes. Her decision was made not a moment too soon, for, by the time she had been to the church to say her prayers, and delivered herself of a few parting sentiments to her sister and brother-in-law, the *Tub* was on the point of starting, and, the moment her foot touched the deck, a rope was unfastened, and we moved from the side of the quay.

‘I think you'll be all right,’ said John Brown, looking in my face ; ‘but the old woman is pretty certain to be ill, so you'd better get her to lie down in the cabin before we get out of the harbour.’

We had no difficulty in making her lie down, for at the first movement of the boat, though it was but slightly perceptible, the

poor dear put her hand to her mouth and clutched at John Brown's arm for support. We took her down the narrow steps and laid her in the queer little bed. John Brown spread a rug over her and tucked her up kindly, and when he told her that the best thing she could do was to shut her eyes and try to sleep, she closed them at once, and said 'Merci' in a feeble voice, his patois being quite comprehensible to her now.

'I don't suppose you will be able to read until you get accustomed to the dip,' said John Brown to me; 'but there's a comfortable chair in the next cabin, and a volume of *Punch* to look at.'

'Oh, I'm going upstairs! I want to see.'

'You'll find it rough when we get out of this creek.'

'I don't mind that, if I can hold on to something, and if—if you won't be cross.'

He laughed, being reminded of the savage way in which he had spoken to me when I stood in danger of being blown off the sea-wall.

‘There’s not so much danger of being blown away as of being wetted. You can’t go on deck in that flimsy state. Do you mind looking rather like a Guy Fawkes?’

‘Not greatly.’

‘Then you wait here a moment.’

He left the cabin quickly. I turned to Mère Lucas and asked her if she felt more comfortable. She shook her head without unclosing her eyes, and made an angry sign with her hand for me to go away and leave her to go to sleep in peace. There was just the slightest movement to the right and left, and the sound of water rippling past the vessel’s side, and a great deal of clattering of heavy feet overhead and calling

out in strong voices. Presently John Brown came back with some things on his arm.

‘If you look sharp,’ said he, ‘we shall be able to get on deck before the pitching begins. Put your arms in this.’

He spoke so peremptorily that I did not wait to consider the subject, but put my arms as he bid me in the sleeves of a great oilskin coat, like the one he wore. It must have been his, for it came right down to my toes, and the sleeves had to be turned back to the elbow almost before my hands came into view. He tied a silk handkerchief round my throat to prevent the collar hurting me, and buttoned the coat all down; then he gave me a long bonnet de nuit of blue worsted to put on my head. I did hesitate at that, but looking down at my yellow oilskin costume, it struck me that nothing could be added to make my appearance more ludicrous; so, laughing heartily,

I tucked my hair into the bonnet and drew it down over my forehead.

‘Will that do?’ I asked.

‘Famously,’ he replied. ‘Now give me your hand, and come along.’

It was rather difficult to get up the little stairs with that rigid coat hampering the movement of my legs and arms ; and I felt very red as I stepped upon deck, fearing the seamen would laugh at me. But they were too busy to take any notice of me. We had got out of the little river that formed the harbour, and were running along between the wooden piers and just passing the coloured crucifix. Between the timbers I could see the white-crested waves tumbling over each other and breaking against the pier. Overhead a great sail was swelling out. The *Tub* was all up on one side and down on the other, and, instead of rolling from side to side, dipped up

and down as she met the waves that came in from the open part, which was just in front. I noticed these things from the corner where John Brown had placed me. I held tight hold of the woodwork, as he bade me, and he held my arm with his strong firm hand.

‘We shall ship a little water in a minute,’ said he; ‘but have no fear—there is no danger.’

And just after that we passed the end of the pier, and a wave, striking the front of the ship, lifted us right up; and then, as we sank down, another wave struck the side and fell with a mighty splash across the boat, wetting the decks and the great sail as well. I also was well sprinkled with the spray; and for a moment the shock took my breath away, and I was terrified by the rise and fall; for at one instant it seemed as though we were going

to be thrown up to the clouds, and the next as if we were going right down to the bottom of the sea. But I felt John Brown's strong grasp on my arm, and saw him smiling at my terror; and then I caught sight of the water in the distance dancing and sparkling in the sunlight, with two or three brown-sailed boats going along very safely; and my courage returned with a kind of reckless excitement; my heart seeming to dance with the waves. Then I thought of poor Mère Lucas, and told John Brown that I should like to go downstairs and assure her that there was no danger.

‘You must wait till you get your sea-legs before you try to go “downstairs,”’ said he. ‘For the present, you can only stay where you are. The old woman’s all right. I’ve sent one of the men down to her. His presence and jolly manner will

give her a greater assurance of safety than your words and odd appearance could impart. Besides, I expect by this time your *bonne* has certain requirements which he is far better able to attend to than you.'

He spoke without exertion ; but I had to shout, and then could scarcely hear my own voice when I replied.

'What requirements?' I cried.

'Basins and things,' he said, with a laugh ; and I own I laughed also. I do not know why we should find the idea ludicrous ; sea-sickness must have been anything but a joke to *Mère Lucas*, poor dear !

The waves were less boisterous as we got away from the pier. The dipping up and down of the *Tub* was quite exhilarating, only she lay over on her side dreadfully. We did not go straight away from the shore, but skirted along it ; and I think I

never have seen a more beautiful sight than the deep purple-blue waves on the one hand, and, on the other, the undulating line of green, with its ragged edge of dark grey rocks, with openings here and there where the villages lay sheltered, with glimpses of wooded country beyond. Noailles, which I had thought the ugliest and dirtiest collection of miserable houses that one could find, from a distance looked neat and clean, and the gable-roofed tower of the church stood up above the shingled cottages, quite an imposing object in the scene. I forgot all about Mère Lucas, and began to fear that the voyage would come to an end all too soon.

‘When shall we get there?’ I asked.

‘All depends upon the wind. It’s against us now; but there’s a change coming on, and, if it don’t drop altogether, the breeze is likely to be in our favour. Any-way, I

don't think we shall get to London to-night. Does that frighten you ?'

I shook my head, and I dare say that he saw I was pleased.

'When did you have luncheon ?' he asked presently.

'Eleven.'

'Getting hungry ?'

I nodded. We did not talk much. He pointed out a thin line of smoke right on the horizon, and told me it was a steamer; and a square white sail, which he said was a brig; and a brown-sailed boat as like the French fishing-boats as could be, I thought, but he called it an Englishman. It surprised me that he could distinguish these peculiarities so far distant; but he certainly had very fine eyes, blue, with a kind of liquid crystalline appearance which I have seen in none others. We had to move once when the great sail was being re-arranged,

and that proved to me that I had not yet got my 'sea-legs,' for without John Brown's support I must have fallen. We seemed to have turned round and to be going back; but we were clearly getting out farther to sea, for the villages became so indistinct that I had to ask John Brown to point out which was Noailles. The wind grew calmer, just as he had prophesied; the clouds grew fewer, and the waves rose and fell less high and low, I thought. John Brown filled a pipe with tobacco and smoked it, having long ceased to hold my arm. I would have given a franc for a slice of bread. I began to wonder how I should go on till the next day without eating, for we had not bargained with John Brown for food—that was as well so far as Mère Lucas was concerned. A short, fat, red-faced man came up on deck, and came towards us with his legs stretched out like

a pair of compasses. He touched his flat blue cap with his brown knuckle, and, smiling at me very pleasantly, said:

‘You’re a better sailor than what your mar is, miss.’ He referred to Mère Lucas.

‘How is she going on, Peter?’ asked John Brown.

‘Well, sir, she’s unshipped most all her ballast now; but she still keeps sort o’ dragging at her anchor like.’

I wondered whether Peter was talking of the ship or Mère Lucas.

‘We’ve been talking along of one another quite chatty betwixt and between,’ Peter continued.

‘Wasn’t aware you could talk French,’ said John Brown.

‘No more I can’t, sir. And she can’t talk English neither. But she says just what comes uppermost, and I replies in the

same sperrit, so it's just as pleasant to both parties. Thought you'd like to know how she were a-going on, miss.'

'Thank you, Peter.'

'She's a-saying her prayers to all apperience, and is likely to go to sleep over 'em, and she may be able to pick up a bit if the wind drops ; but if there ain't no frogs for dinner, I reckon she won't miss em much. Wind's a-dropping down, sir ; looks as if we should get a little off the land at sundown.'

'Yes. Tell Dick to look alive.'

'Ay, ay, sir. I'll go down to your mar again directly, miss, and have another chat, so be she's still on the drag.'

With that Peter knuckled his cap again, and walked in his bear-like way to the other end of the ship, where there was another set of stairs.

'Perhaps you would like me to tell Peter

that Mère Lucas is not your mother ?' said John Brown.

'I hope you will do nothing of the kind,' I replied, feeling a little indignant.

'I am glad to hear it,' he said quietly. 'By-the bye, what's your name ?'

'Gertrude Graham. My father called me Gertie.'

'Then I shall call you Gertie. Do you object ?'

'Not much.'

'One's obliged to address persons by name sometimes, and, of all words in the language, "miss" is to me the most detestable.'

'I don't see anything in the word objectionable. It is the common title of all English young ladies, isn't it ?'

'There's another contemptible word—"young lady"!' he said, knitting his brows.

I laughed.

‘Would you have all men and women called “citizen” and “citizeness”?’

‘Oh, I’m not a red Republican! “Citizeness” would be as hateful as “miss,” under certain conditions. Associations make words pleasant or detestable.’

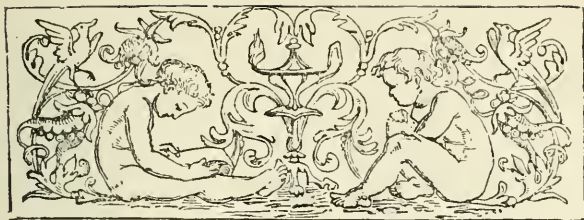
‘And associations make the name of “young lady” unpleasant to you.’

‘Yes.’

He dropped his elbows on the bulwark of the ship, and his bearded chin in the palms of his hands, and, puffing at his pipe, looked out to sea, while I ruminated on the odd and not flattering observations of this strange fisherman. And there he rested, seeming to have forgotten me, until a man, dressed ever so much better than he, came to his side and spoke to him in a low voice. John Brown nodded, slipped his

pipe in his pocket, and, turning to me, said :

‘Dinner is served. Will you give me the pleasure of your company ?’



CHAPTER V.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE DINES WITH JOHN
BROWN.

JOHN BROWN helped me to go downstairs, though the movement of the boat was now so regular that I could have very well descended alone ; and, when he had thrown off my greatcoat, I went into the little cabin where Mère Lucas lay, to put my hair in order. Mère Lucas was unmistakably asleep, and snoring in such contented tones that I felt it would be unkind to disturb her ; so I went quietly about my

toilette, and, when I had made myself look as nice as I could, I left her and returned to the larger cabin. There I found John Brown, but so altered in appearance that, for the first moment, I mistook him for the man who had announced that the dinner was ready. Instead of his yellow oilskin dress and great boots, he was dressed in a close-fitting suit of blue cloth and a pair of light shoes. He did not look so preposterously big in this suit, but still taller and broader, more erect, and handsomer than any man I have ever seen, I think. I found he had a fine fair forehead, and, though his hair was cut too short to be pretty, it had a nice little wave over the temples, and was very silky and glossy. I was so perplexed and astonished by this change that I cannot recall what took place for the next ten minutes, except that I took the seat that was placed for me opposite to

him, and that the servant, instead of serving the soup in a bowl, brought it in two bright little silver cups and turned it into our plates. I noticed also that the table was covered with a fair white damask cloth, and that the service was handsomer than that of Madame Piquois, which she produces only on fête days, and not then if Monsieur le Curé is expected, lest he should consider her guilty of luxury; the forks seemed to be silver, and the knives had white ivory handles, the like of which I never had seen before.

John Brown asked some questions about Mère Lucas, and I replied in a vacant, stupid manner, of which I was only too conscious; but I was, to a certain degree, bewildered by this unlooked-for aspect of affairs, and very much embarrassed by the presence of the well-dressed servant, who, standing behind his master, looked at me in

an impudent, sly way, and seemed to be listening to every word I uttered. John Brown, I fancy, saw that I was under constraint, and when the servant—whose name I found was Barton—had served the fish, he, with a motion of his hand, dismissed him from the cabin. Then I made an effort to be at ease.

‘Did you catch this fish?’ I asked.

‘No,’ he replied, smiling. ‘I don’t care much for fishing.’

‘Then you don’t get your living by fishing?’

He shook his head and laughed.

‘What made you think I did?’ he asked.

‘You looked more like a fisherman than Mère Lucas’s brother-in-law.’

‘Ah, you have formed your idea of fishermen from picture-books!’

‘From what Mère Lucas has told me, and from what I have read in poems.’

‘There’s something in common between Mère Lucas and some poets.’

‘And then this ship is not much unlike the other ships at Noailles, except that it is cleaner, and hasn’t a great hole in the centre.’

‘True. The *Tub* was a fishing-smack once upon a time—and a very high-flavoured one, too, until it was purified; and just over our heads was that hole in the centre you speak of. Only a year ago there were fish where we are now—a mass of slippery things higher than you can reach above your head.’

Looking round the cabin, with its varnished deal wainscot and ceiling, its white floor, its comfortable chairs and rugs, and the table covered with glittering glass and plate, it was difficult to realize the fact which John Brown stated; and it was difficult also to fancy John Brown with dry

fish-scales on his finger-nails, like the fishermen at Noailles.

‘What do you use your ship for now?’ I asked.

‘For running away from the old world in search of a new.’

‘I should think that Captain Cook discovered all that was worth finding.’

‘Not he. He left the world little worse than he found it. It’s the other Cook who’s spoilt it. There’s little to be hoped for after the cheap excursion.’

‘You didn’t expect to find anything undiscovered on the coast of Normandy, did you?’

‘Not much, Gertie. My heart fell when I saw that somebody’s Royal Windsor Starch was to be had in packets at the chandler’s shop in Noailles. Ifancy I must have been reflecting upon the hopelessness of Normandy when you came to revive my courage.’

‘ I ?’

‘ You. Such a child as you might live in the world I am looking for.’

I understand—at least, I think so—now what he meant ; but I did not at the time, and I was anything but pleased to be taken as the type of a little savage ; also I resented being called a child. He had his eyes upon me and laughed, perhaps because of my displeasure.

‘ You don’t like that, Gertie,’ said he. ‘ You think you have some claim to the advanced stage of civilization, after spending a dozen francs on a fashionable bonnet at Bayeux—eh ? When you come to know how vulgar and false and heartless and soulless are the people of the old world, you will think I paid you a compliment in fancying that you bore no resemblance to them.’

‘ I am sure you are in error about me

and Neufbourg,' said I, after a little reflection. 'Neufbourg is not in a desert, and I am not at all like Pocahontas.'

'Tell me all about Neufbourg,' said he.

'What do you want to know?'

'In the first place, is there a piano there?'

'No.'

'That's to its credit.'

'Why? Don't you like music?'

'Yes, I do like music; and that is why I dislike pianos.'

'I don't understand that. Instrumental music is very nice, and the better the instrument the more agreeable I should think the sounds must be. The piano, I am told, is better than the clavecin. I have listened to Madame Piquois's clavecin with great pleasure; but, if anyone could have tuned it and replaced the broken strings, it would have been pleasanter still to hear.'

‘ Ah, Madame Piquois possesses a clavecin, does she ?’ he asked.

‘ Yes. Marie’s cousin at Avranches sent her pieces of music quite modern, and she played them, and I was never tired of listening. Do you know “ Suavita ” ?’

‘ No.’

‘ That was my favourite——’

I stopped, for it came into my mind that I might never hear the clavecin and my favourite air again ; and I thought of Madame Piquois and dear Marie and Jeanne, and how Marie, on my last visit to them, had sat down and played “ Suavita ” to please me, as she thought, and how she played false notes and wept all the time, while Jeanne and Madame Piquois, sitting with me on the canapé, were biting their lips and doing their utmost to avoid bursting into tears with me. My heart ached bitterly with these recollections ; and I laid

my knife and fork down quietly, and drew out my handkerchief furtively, lest John Brown should see that I was crying. I saw him glance at me; and then, as he kept his eyes fixed on his plate and said nothing, I concluded that he knew how these memories affected me.

‘And what kind of country is there about Neufbourg, Gertie?’ he asked, after a pause.

‘Oh, the most beautiful in the world, I think!’ said I—‘at least, I saw nothing so nice in all the route to Noailles! You can find everything that is beautiful there. From the hill-tops you look over leagues and leagues of woods right away to St. Michael’s Rock standing up out of the sea; and from the valleys you look up ravines that are blue with hyacinths in the spring and purple with fox-gloves later on; and where the river goes tumbling along its

rocky course at the foot of the woods, there are thousands and thousands of primroses and snowdrops that hang over the water, and yellow irises, and all kinds of orchids; and, when the apples are in flower, you can tell where there are dwellings by the patches of pink bloom that smother them up. Then there are two rivers, neither very large; but, oh, what a noise the Canse makes when it bounces down the great rocks where St. Michael cheated the devil! And the Canson is not much quieter when it makes the fall by the Pas au Diable—the rivers look large enough then, I assure you.'

'Wait,' said John Brown; 'you are running on too quickly. I should like to know how the devil was cheated.'

I told him how the devil bought the glittering palace made by St. Michael, and how, when he entered it, the heat of his

body melted the icicles of which it was formed, and so, as the peasants believe, made the cascade for perpetuity. And it surprised me to see how much pleasure John Brown took in this legend, which, of course, is quite without foundation of fact.

‘And that *Pas au Diable*,’ he said, when I had come to an end of the story—‘that sounds as if it should have something to do with the history of my unfortunate friend. Did St. Michael serve him badly there?’

‘Oh, he served him worse than ever there!’ said I; and I narrated how the devil and St. Michael started to race round the world for a wager, and how the saint tripped up the sinner and kicked him right across the valley on to the hard rocks opposite, where the marks of his horns and his hoofs are shown now.

‘Have you seen the marks, Gertie?’ asked John Brown gravely.

‘Oh yes!’ said I. ‘But his horns were wonderfully close together, and his toes very wide apart. Of course, you know, I don’t believe the story.’

‘Don’t you?’ said he. ‘Well, I’m glad to hear it, for the saint’s sake. Are there any more evidences of the devil’s residence at Neufbourg?’

‘Only the Needle. That’s a great rock pointed at the top, and as tall as the mast of your ship. It is said that, if one watches it at midnight, it may be seen to turn round three times. But no one has had the courage to do that for a long time, for the ivy about its base is as thick round as my arm.’

‘Does everyone in Neufbourg believe these traditions—except you?’

‘No; Madame Piquois doesn’t, and I

don't think Monsieur l'Abbé does, although he will never tell you what he thinks on the subject, because he naturally doesn't wish to shake the faith of his people. Monsieur le Maire wouldn't allow that these things are true, for he is a Republican, and won't believe in anything.'

'Ah, I suppose he goes about undoing all the work of Monsieur le Curé?'

'No; he has too much occupation in his fields and with the cows to interfere with other people's business; only it's generally understood that he doesn't believe in anything. Then there are several families of educated people—rentiers, you know, who couldn't believe in such things—people who only wear sabots on week-days, and never wear caps at all.'

'Oh, there are folks who wear boots on Sundays!'

'Of course there are,' I said, getting a

little impatient at his density. 'Madame Piquois has her dresses from Paris. Every spring and autumn she receives catalogues illustrated from the Bon Marché and the Louvre at Paris.'

'That seems unwise. What is the use of putting on fine clothes if no one is to see them?'

'But they are seen!' I cried. 'Every Sunday when it is fine we walk along the grande route towards St. Denis, and the people of St. Denis walk out towards Neufbourg, and, when they meet and stop to say 'Bonjour,' they take notice of everything you've got on.'

'But you didn't indulge in such folly, surely?'

'If I didn't, it was for no want of curiosity. I should have liked a dress from Paris above all things, if papa had been rich enough to afford it.'

I thought this would disgust John Brown, for his ideal seemed to me a poor half-witted barbarian who believed in fabulous stories, and I did not wish him to class me among such creatures. But I saw no sign of contempt in his face, though I tried to find out from his expression what he thought of me. He leant back in his chair and looked at me fixedly with his clear blue eyes, and I could not discover what his thoughts were ; only I thought that his feeling must be a kindly one, from the repose of his face.

Barton came to take away the roast.

‘Let us go upon deck,’ said John Brown ; ‘the evening should be very fine. You need not fear the waves now. Put something warm about your shoulders, and you can dispense with the oilskins. Do you think you can walk steadily now, or shall I wait for you ?’

‘I can go alone well now. I will come up as soon as I have seen that Mère Lucas is comfortable.’

‘Good. We can continue our serious talk and watch the stars come out at the same time.’



CHAPTER VI.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE AND JOHN BROWN TALK
OF STRANGE THINGS IN FACT AND FICTION.

I SAT down for five minutes beside Mère Lucas, who still slept; and then, as she made no sign of waking, I left her. The sailor named Peter was in the next cabin clearing the table; he said he had a pot of tea all ready for the old lady, and promised me he would keep a bright look-out, and be smart in his attentions as soon as she roused up.

The beauty of the sky and sea seemed to take my breath away as I stood upon the

deck and looked round me. There was scarcely any movement in the water, and so little wind that now and then the sail played idly. No land was in sight, nothing but the wide-spread sea, the over-arching sky, and a golden radiance where the sun dipped below the horizon. I wonder if my dear father, who wrote upon great subjects, could have described this scene? I cannot, and there is no need to make the attempt here, for surely I can never forget it. My heart seemed to swell within me, and for a time I was overpowered with a feeling of reverence for the Great Creator of the world which was so grand and beautiful to my eyes. I know not how long I had stood there holding by the wood at the top of the stairs, when I perceived John Brown, and awoke, as it were, from the ecstasy in which my mind was enthralled. He was seated at a little distance to my right, his elbow on his

knee, and his bearded chin resting in the palm of his hand, regarding me intently while he smoked his pipe. He pointed to a low chair by his side, and I went and sat down. He must have known that I did not want to talk just then, for he said nothing, but continued to smoke his pipe as if I were not there, and I felt grateful for his considerate silence. Presently Barton came, with coffee and a dish of curious-looking fruit that provoked my curiosity ; and by the time John Brown had told me where the fruit came from and I had tasted it, and sweetened my coffee and tasted that, my thoughts had come down to their ordinary level.

The sun sank down and down, but his glory rested for a long while on the sea and sky ; and, watching the beautiful change of colours, we were both silent, for it was not a subject on which one could talk thought-

lessly. Now and then John Brown spoke a few words—of a cloud flushing with rose as it caught a lingering ray, of a golden ripple on the water, of the cold sadness in the forsaken east ; but he smoked on all the time until his pipe was empty, and then he rose and left me. I thought of my friends in Neufbourg, and wished them with me to share my delight ; and I reflected how little the people who dwell all their lives in one place know of the beauty of the world they live in, and how little they care even for the beauties that surround them, knowing no contrast. While I was in this reverie, my knitted shawl was laid over my shoulders, and, turning in surprise, I found that it was John Brown who cared for me. One must have a good heart who, wanting no protection for himself, can yet feel solicitude for the want of another.

‘Let us walk up and down a bit ; shall

we?’ he asked. And then, as I rose, he continued, ‘You’ll grow sad if you watch those dying colours longer. You were looking as grave as a little judge when I came upon you just now. I should like to know what was going on in your mind.’

‘I was thinking how much there is to be seen in the world, and how little many people see.’

‘They have their advantages, those little-seeing people.’

‘I can’t understand that,’ said I.

‘That’s because you have seen so little. Have you read Hans Andersen’s stories?’

‘Yes.’

‘What did that poor little water-maiden get by knowing more than her sisters?’

‘She got an immortal soul. And it was better to break her heart than to live for a whole lifetime carelessly, and be nothing but sea-foam after.’

John Brown made no reply, and we walked up and down the deck twice or thrice without a word ; but he must have been thinking upon the subject, for, when he stopped and leant upon the side of the ship, he said :

‘ This is about the time the sisters should come to the surface ; we may be lucky enough to see one, Gertie.’

He spoke so seriously that I could not at the moment think he was joking.

‘ You don’t believe in mermaids, do you ?’ I asked.

He looked at me with a curious interest in his face, and then, smiling, he said :

‘ No ; but I believe in sirens.’

I did not at all understand what he meant. His manner perplexed me.

‘ You believe in sirens ?’ I said.

‘ Yes, if I’m not mistaken in my mythological notions. They were rare young

persons who changed the Argonauts into brutes, weren't they ?

‘No, oh no ! They failed to make any impression on the Argonauts because Ulysses made them deaf that they might not hear their singing. Then the sirens killed themselves in despair. It was Circe who changed them into brutes. She was an enchantress ; but the sirens were half-monsters and half beautiful nymphs.’

‘Ah, it's so long since I left school !’ said John Brown. ‘The siren I spoke of is a mixture of the two—rather more than half monster, addicted to the use of dress, and for the rest, beautiful enough. Hans Andersen's nymphs are ten thousand times better to think about. Let us look for them.’

‘But I should like to know about the siren. I am very fond of fiction.’

‘Oh, but this is a fact !’

‘I’m almost as fond of facts,’ I said, laughing; for, to tell the truth, I was curious to know what he really did mean.

‘So you will know more—eh?’ he asked; and then, rising from the side, he thrust his hands in his pockets, and we again walked along the deck. ‘She lives somewhere over there,’ he said, nodding his head towards the north. ‘Nobody loves her, and she loves nobody; but, as she never did love anyone, it requires a good breadth of philanthropy to feel any pity for her.’

‘But some one must have loved her, or there wouldn’t be any story.’

‘That’s true. Well, once upon a time, a young fellow—he must have been a prince, he was so very stupid—went sailing along, with the wind in his favour, a clear sky above, and not a care in his heart until he

came to the island where this siren lived. She sat upon the yellow sands and sang of pleasant things, and beckoned to the prince to come and sing with her. You may be sure she took care to conceal all that was objectionable about her, so that the prince saw only that which was beautiful, and heard no more than the sweet sound of her voice. The nearer he came to her the more beautiful she seemed to him ; and, as she smiled and beckoned, he lost all thought of what might become of him, and, altering the course of his boat, he made straight for the yellow sands. If he had been a careful sailor, he would have kept a little way from that dangerous shore and parleyed with the doubtful lady, and made himself sure that she was concealing nothing unpleasant from his sight. But, being only a prince, he took so little heed that his boat—which was called, if I

remember rightly, the *Good Fortune*—struck upon the hidden rocks and went to pieces there and then. So there was no getting away from the siren after that; and he soon found that, though she could sing so sweetly of love, she had none at all in her heart and that, except her beautiful face, all was hideous and loathsome. And now that she saw he was in her power, she made scarcely any attempt to deceive him as to her real nature. With that the romance of that young fellow's life came to an end, and he had to resign himself to the disagreeable necessity of living a loveless life in the society of this very repulsive young person. But that was not the only punishment entailed by his recklessness. You, who remember so well your "Magnall's Questions," may divine that worse was in store for the prince. The process of brutalization began. When he found his likeness

in a pool, he perceived that his features were losing their delicacy; and when he heard his own voice, which was now seldom used for singing purposes, he discovered that it had lost its sweetness. The change was going on in his whole being. He could not see things as he had seen them with his youthful eyes; he could not even think of things in the old young spirit. It puzzled him at first where this change would end; but he soon saw the direction his metamorphosis was taking. He was gradually becoming like the creature he most despised and hated; and in his altered form he detected a growing likeness to the siren.'

'And what became of him ultimately?' I asked, for John Brown ceased to speak.

'Oh, the story breaks off there!'

'No story ends like that,' said I. 'If

the tale is of your own inventing, you ought to finish it off properly.'

'That is just where I fail as a good story-teller. I can begin a tale well; but when I've got my characters into a difficulty, and it's to bring about a happy dénouement, I break down. Now, how should you finish that, Gertie?'

'I should make his return to humanity depend upon the love of a good girl.'

'That's a capital idea!'

'And, just as the siren's society brutalized him, so the better woman's ministering would humanize him.'

'Why, that's quite logical! But how's he to get away from the siren?'

'Oh, she'd have to die, of course; and then the really beautiful and perfect nymph would come and marry him!'

'Ah! But supposing the siren wouldn't die until the prince's nature had so changed

that physically and morally he was loathsome? What sort of a princess would have him? Not a very good-looking one, I'm afraid.'

'Yes, she would, if her heart was good as well as her looks.'

'That's the only weak part of the hypothesis. A forced unnatural conclusion will spoil my story. Better leave it fragmentary. I'll put the siren out of the way and welcome, if you can only prove to my satisfaction that the pretty princess will marry my stupid brute of a prince. Do you think it likely, for example, that you would marry him if you were in the young princess's place?'

'Of course I would,' said I, 'if I knew that, by marrying him and using all the power I had, I could bring him back to his former state. Any girl would jump at such a chance. That's just the very thing

that's wanting to make marriage perfect, in my opinion—the prospect of doing some great work to earn her husband's love and admiration, and trust and confidence.'

'You are right, Gertie,' he said, after a long silence. 'You can finish a story better than I can begin one even. See what a lot of stars have come out!'

Indeed, the heavens were now thickly sprinkled with glittering silver points, which had come out while we were discussing in this manner; for I have not written here one quarter of our conversation, but merely the outline of it.



CHAPTER VII.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE'S SEA VOYAGE COMES
TO AN END.

MÈRE LUCAS had been drinking some tisane that Peter the sailor prepared for her, and the little cabin was very close and stuffy, and smelt very strong of rum. My poor old bonne was very cross and fretful, and would on no account allow the small round window to be opened. So John Brown advised me to sleep in a hammock which he arranged in the room where we had dined.

‘Go and take off any bone things you

may have on, and bring a pillow,' said he; and I felt bound to do as he told me, for he spoke in an authoritative way that would not allow of question. I took off my corsets in the little cabin, and put on my flannel matinée in place of my dress, and then I took the pillow into the other cabin. He was still arranging the hammock, which was curious and beautiful—of Mexican make, he told me—with its open network and deep fringes of coloured silk.

'I've been thinking, Gertie, that I should like to look at that book your father wrote,' said he. 'Have you any objection to my seeing it?'

Of course I had no objection. I went to my box and carried one of the parcels of manuscript to John Brown—one was as much as I could easily carry at a time.

'Is it all here?' he asked, taking the parcel out of my hands.

‘Oh dear, no ; there are five more like that ! I’ll fetch them.’

‘One’ll be about enough for to-night,’ he said, laughing. ‘Now then, your hammock’s ready for you.’

It was about two feet from the ground ; but it swung lightly with the motion of the boat. And I stood wondering how I should get in, remembering how Robinson Crusoe fell over on the other side when he first attempted to get into a hammock ; but, while I was holding it, John Brown lifted me up as though I had been no heavier than a kitten, yet as tenderly as possible, and, before I knew what was happening, I found myself lying in the hammock with my head on the pillow. He laid some warm soft skin rugs over me, and tucked them under my feet, which I had slipped into my chaussons ; and then, coming to my head, asked me if I felt quite comfortable.

I thanked him, and held out my hand, saying 'Good-night ;' for he seemed now quite an old friend, or as I should think an uncle would be to me, by reason of his easy manner and a certain kind of protective familiarity which was unlike the behaviour of any man I have ever met except my dear father.

He held my hand for a few moments, looking down into my face the while ; then he bent down and kissed my forehead, and I think he sighed as he turned away and left me. When I had said my prayers, I began to wonder whether John Brown had left the cabin or not. The light was still burning, and I had not heard him go upstairs, and, being very curious to know whether he was reading my father's book—of which I cannot help being proud—I presently turned my head round very quietly and glanced round the room. He was seated

by the table, with his hand upon the parcel of manuscript, which was unopened ; but he was not looking at it, and he did not move his hand. I wondered what he could be thinking about, as I turned silently to my former position. And soon afterwards I fell asleep, saying to myself that, if my countrymen were all like John Brown, the French were not to be compared with them for niceness.

No one was in the cabin when I awoke the next morning. The sunlight streamed through the glazed opening above, and the light reflected from the water, coming in through the little window in the side, danced fantastically upon the ceiling. I got out of my hammock without difficulty, there being even less movement than on the preceding evening, and, opening the port, peeped out. To my surprise, I found that the ship was quite stationary, and that the

land was but a little distance away. I could see children on the shore in front of the pretty houses. I made haste to get upon deck ; but it took me a little time to decide whether I should put on my leather shoes and old dress, or my best frock and my Louis Quinze shoes. I finally dressed myself in my best, for the sea-water had taken all the polish off my other shoes, and my old merino would not go at all with the pretty ones ; and, besides that, I did not want John Brown to remember me as a kind of half-savage peasant-girl. It was the first time of wearing my new dress ; and, when I looked at myself in the glass, I found it very becoming, the black-net sleeves and bodice making my arms and neck look very nice.

John Brown was seated with a book on his knee ; but he saw me the moment I stepped upon the deck, and, dropping the

book in his capacious pocket, came to meet me.

‘That’s the Isle of Wight,’ said he. ‘Portsmouth is beyond — over there. We’re waiting for the wind. If it freshens, we can go on ; if it don’t, we must stop here. But there’s a rail which will take you to the other side of the island, and thence a steamer will run you over to Portsmouth. You can go that way if you’re in a hurry to escape.’

His brusqueness and the short manner in which he laid this matter before me, without even shaking hands or exchanging the ordinary morning greetings, surprised and, I will own, frightened me ; and for the moment I heartily wished I had not been so foolish as to put on my best dress—for to that only could I attribute the great difference in his behaviour to me. He thought me a peasant, and treated me

with parental familiarity and kindness because he liked peasants; and now my appearance, and perhaps my father's book, showed him that he had been in error, and he set me down for a 'young lady,' that sort of person for whom he had expressed his dislike.

'I am not in a hurry to escape,' I said; and then, feeling rather indignant at his unreasonable treatment, added—'Are you?'

'In the manner of Captain Kidd,' he replied, a little crease forming under his eyes. 'Here comes Barton with your *goûté*; I thought you would like to have it here rather than below—the morning is so beautiful. That'll do, Barton. Fetch me some beer.'

He handed me a serviette, then the bowl of milk and coffee, and a crisp new roll, for which he must have sent to the island expressly, I thought.

With the serviette spread on my lap, and the bowl upon my knees, I could soak the bread and eat, looking at the beautiful island the while.

‘I needn’t ask how you are,’ said he, ‘unless you decline to give me your hand without that formality. You slept as I should think angels sleep, and you look like’— he paused, as if to find a suitable comparison—‘like nothing in the world that ever I’ve seen but yourself. You seem to have brought the sparkle and life and wholesome purity from your beloved waterfalls away there in Neufbourg. I believe this little hand of yours could heal by touch. I shall send for you when the doctors give me up—— Why, you little goose, what’s the matter? Do I look as if I were going to die?’

‘No But, all the same, I’d rather not talk about it.’

I took my hand from his, and busied myself with my breakfast. He said not a word for some minutes. I believe he was regarding me, but I would not look up, because the tears were in my eyes, and I did not want him to see how stupid I was. It is true—I am a goose; my heart will ache at the thought of death and loss. A strong man can have but little patience with such weakness. When he spoke again, it was of the island, and in quite another mood. He had seated himself near me, and sat leaning forward with his arms resting on his knees. He said we were looking at the prettier end of the island, and that it would disappoint me to see it closer, by reason of the people on it. There were a rather vulgar set of visitors on this side, who came, as it appeared, chiefly for the pleasure of carving their names on any unscathed surface they were

lucky enough to find. They would stare very hard at me—staring was one of their peculiarities—and they would in all likelihood laugh at Mère Lucas—to laugh at anyone unlike themselves being a special characteristic of Cockneys. The natives, he assured me, were harmless, though born with instincts which would have led them to be brigands had they not found it more remunerative to let lodgings. The other side of the island was dull and relegated to ‘swells’—persons who were rather ridiculous than offensive, and amused themselves with toy-boats called yachts. He pointed out a most graceful and beautiful-looking ship not far from where we were anchored, and assured me that the decks were washed every morning with rose-water, and manned with sailors who wore kid gloves and patent-leather pumps. It seemed to me that he found nothing to admire in mankind

and a great deal to despise ; but one thing was certain, he was not discontented with me, though he had had ample time to observe my new dress and my shoes as well. His manner to me was as kind as it had been the night before, and this set me wondering why his behaviour at first had been so different, and what he meant by saying he wished to escape in the manner of Captain Kidd. These speculations so completely occupied my mind after a while, that I took very little notice of what he was talking about ; but, when he ceased to speak, I said to him, as I folded up my serviette :

‘ Who was Captain Kidd ? ’

‘ A consummate rascal, I should say,’ he replied.

‘ Then why did you wish to do anything that he did ? ’

‘ Oh, that’s what you’ve been thinking

about these last few minutes—eh?’ he cried, after a moment or two of reflection. ‘I couldn’t make out at first what you referred to. You want another story, I suppose?’

‘I want to know what you meant.’

He had filled his pipe when I finished my coffee, and now he lit it.

‘Captain Kidd, if I remember rightly,’ he said, punctuating his sentence with a whiff of smoke, ‘was an honest mariner—until he fell in love. If he smuggled anything, it must have been British brandy, for he loved his country and hated the French, like a good mariner of the old school. Now one day, as he was walking about in Bristol city, with no sort of guilt in his heart, and his hands in his pockets, he was accosted by a young gentleman, who said he wished to speak a few words with him on a matter of business. Captain

Kidd, who never let slip an opportunity of turning an honest penny, at once turned into an adjacent tavern and called for a bottle, which he generously shared with the young gentleman. Stimulated by half a pint of Madeira, the young gentleman, who showed symptoms of nervousness at the offset, put his affairs plainly before Captain Kidd. He was desperately in love with a young lady of Bath, named Susan, and they had resolved to be married. But as both parties were minors, and the parents on each side were opposed to the match, their union could only be effected clandestinely. Now the question was, Would Captain Kidd, for a purse of gold, take the young people beyond the reach of their guardians where they could be married in peace? The Captain, after mature deliberation, in which he assured himself that, if he did not take the purse of gold and the young

people, another captain would, consented to oblige the young gentleman, if, after seeing the young lady, he was convinced she was a consenting party to their elopement. This assurance was easily to be obtained, and the two men drove over to Bath in a post-chaise that very afternoon, where the blushing Susan confirmed with her own lips all that her lover had attested. It was agreed that at daybreak the next morning these three persons should meet upon the quay at Bristol, and thence embark aboard the Captain's barque. As an earnest of his intention, the young gentleman gave Kidd the purse of gold in advance, and they separated amicably. But the Captain had fallen in love with Susan at the first glance, and, for the rest of the day, and the whole of the ensuing night, he could do nothing but walk about in a state of frantic excitement, murmuring the name of Susan and

cursing his fate. It was gall and worm-wood to him to think of uniting the young person he adored to the young man he heartily detested; and, if he had not received the purse of gold, and possessed the traditional honesty of a British tar, he would have set sail and left the young people in the lurch, to be caught by their parents and torn asunder. However, at the appointed hour, there he was upon the quay, with his boat ready to start. As luck would have it, Susan had brought her boxes with her, and there was only just room in the Captain's gig for the young lady and her luggage and the Captain; so it was arranged that the young gentleman should wait on the quay until the Captain had put his cargo on board and returned for him; and there he might have waited until this day without seeing the fulfilment of his wishes. For, no sooner had Kidd shoved

off from the quay than, tempted by the ravishing beauty of Susan and the evil prompting of his jealous heart, he boldly determined to play his rival false; and he did. As soon as he had Susan and her luggage on board, he slipped his cable, and sailed away to the southern seas.'

'What became of them?' I asked.

'I don't know. Captain Kidd never returned to Bristol, you may be sure; but he was subsequently heard of in the South Pacific. What became of Susan I can't tell. As usual, my story breaks down in the middle. Can you finish it happily?'

'I don't see how such a story could finish happily.'

'It's pretty certain that Susan did not care greatly for the young gentleman, or her eyes wouldn't have been so ready to bewitch Captain Kidd. Evidently she had no affection for her parents. The Captain

could be very agreeable now and then ; and there are some vastly pleasant places in the South Pacific. Don't you think they might have settled down on an island, and lived happily ever after ?

‘ That depends upon whether she was a nice girl or not.’

‘ Oh, there's no doubt about that ! She was a little thoughtless perhaps, being young ; but she had the qualities that make a good woman.’

‘ Then she could never have been happy, nor he either ; and the better they grew, the more wretched they would have become.’

‘ You're right, Gertie. They would have had to strangle conscience to be happy, and get but a poor, shabby sort of happiness, after all. And, heavens, how they would have quarrelled in bad weather !’ After a pause, he asked, ‘ Have you read “ The Corsair,” Gertie ?’

‘No. Why?’

‘I was wondering whether the heroine in that story would have been the same if Byron had known you.’

It was after luncheon, when the ship was once more under sail, and John Brown and I were leaning upon the side, looking at the beautiful island as its woods and downs and grand cliffs passed before our eyes, that he said to me :

‘I dipped into the “Cosmographical Dictionary” last night, Gertie.’

‘Did you like it?’ I asked, feeling a little glow of pride in my heart.

‘Moderately,’ he replied. ‘I don’t remember ever being very much carried away by facts. Nature has bumped my head in queer places, and my brain is dull to perceive charms which strike many others with admiration. My limited judgment only permits me to speak in a general way,

and in a general way I should say that the "Dictionary" is a great work.'

'Papa was fifteen years compiling it.'

'He must have had a great deal of patience.'

'He loved me very dearly.'

He said nothing until the pain this recollection caused me had passed ; then :

'He must have had a lot of books and maps, and so on, for reference.'

'Yes ; but they were all sold with the furniture. Papa had not written any articles for the *Anthropologist* for a long while—he was so anxious to finish the "Dictionary." And there were a good many bills to be paid at the last.'

'Yes,' said he thoughtfully. 'What are you going to do when you get to London?'

'I shall find the editor of the *Anthropologist*, and ask his advice about papa's book. I wrote to him from Neufbourg,

but no answer came ; so I suppose the office of the magazine is removed. Of course, I can find that out by inquiry.'

' Yes ; and, if he can get you a good price for it, what shall you do—go back to your friends at Neufbourg ?'

' I shall not go back there.'

' Why not ?'

I reflected a moment ; and then, perceiving that it would be false modesty to conceal my reason, I answered as firmly as I could :

' Because I believe there is something better to do than to rest all one's life in a remote village amongst half-educated people.'

' Oh, Lord ! You don't think of becoming a doctor, or of giving lectures to the working-classes, or elevating the tone of the stage, I hope ?'

' No,' said I. ' If I do stupid things, it

will not be in any of these directions. I think I should like to travel with pleasant people—a lady with two or three nice daughters who don't mind my being a little ignorant, or some maiden ladies with cultivated tastes and refined manners—gentlewomen such as I have read of——'

'And are not likely to find——'

'If I look only for their faults,' I said sharply, capping him as he had capped me.

'That's true, Gertie. I know my mother was the best woman in the world; but I dare say there are many sons who can say the same thing. Don't mind what I said; you will find friends. I don't know who might, if you can't. Have you thought what you should do if the publishers don't give a good price? I should think the dictionary would be costly to produce, with all those little maps; and the reading public, so far as my observation leads me to

think, don't jump at "cosmographical dictionaries." Now, supposing the booksellers won't snap it up, but keep you in suspense, dangling about their offices—eh?

'I have thought of that. I don't expect to succeed the very first day. I know it may be weeks or months before it is all settled.'

'Yes. Do you mind telling me how much money you have, Gertie?'

'Over twelve hundred francs.'

'About fifty pounds—yes. And supposing, Gertie, some Humboldt of a fellow has just produced a big work of this kind, and the publishers daren't take your father's book at all?'

'Do you think that is likely?'

'It is an ugly possibility.'

'After all,' I said, when I had looked at the matter in this new light, 'it is only a question of time and patience. In time

there will be a demand for another work of this kind, and then papa's " Dictionary " will be accepted. I don't think papa would have given so much time and labour to his book if he had not been quite certain of the result.'

' Very likely ; but a literary man secluded from the world is likely to miscalculate results, I should say. He may think, for example, that literary excellence will ensure the success of a literary work ; whereas, so far as my observation goes, literary excellence is the last thing that publishers are concerned about. If I dishearten you, it is not wilfully nor wantonly. You have enough troubles to face without those that careless conversation may add. But, you see, I want to find out if you are prepared to meet the worst that may befall you. You've made me responsible for your welfare, to a certain degree.'

‘I?’

‘Yes. If a fledgling had the mischance to flutter down from his nest in the cliff out there, and fell upon this deck, I should feel bound to see that he could use his wings and feet before I suffered him to flutter away into the sea. And, before I let you go, I want to know how you are prepared to buffet against adversities. What will you do, for instance, while the publishers are settling the destinies of the “Cosmographical Dictionary?”’

‘I shall take a very small apartment in London, and live as cheaply as ever I can.’

‘You don’t know what London is like, Gertie—less than the fledgling up there knows of the waters down here and their dangers. Of living cheaply in apartments I have only a vague notion; but it is enough to make me shudder at the thought

of your attempting it. What kind of people would you mix with? What sort of existence could you lead?’

‘The same as other girls in my position. It’s no good thinking I am better if I’m not.’

He took no heed of my reply—he seemed not to hear it, but looked steadily across the water, under his bent brows, in silent thought.

‘I know what we’ll do, Gertie,’ he said presently, turning to me with a more cheerful expression on his face; ‘we’ll run into a little place on the other side of the island, instead of going over to Portsmouth, and you shall take lodgings there. You’ll find them cheaper and better than any you could get in London, and stand a fair chance of finding the publishers you are in search of all the same. You can keep your old *bonne* with you; and I’ll go up to London

and sell your "Dictionary." A man can bargain with another man better than a young girl could; and, if the fellow won't publish it at once, I'll make him give me some money down—enough to keep you for a year or two—and an understanding that the rest shall be paid upon publication.'

'Oh, you are good!'—that was all I could say or think of at the moment.

'It's the first time I've ever heard it said of me—with any appearance of sincerity,' he replied, with a laugh.

'But it won't do,' I went on, as I began to see the impossibility of carrying out his plan.

'Oh, don't let's have any young-lady nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'You need not fear that I shall take advantage of your good-nature in permitting me to do this little service. When I've brought you back the money for your book, I'll bid

you good-bye—perhaps I'll kiss your forehead as I kissed it last night. And then I'll set sail, and give you my oath never to see you again.'

Had he struck me with his hand I should not have felt more pained.

'I'd rather anything happen than that,' I said.

He looked at me most strangely for a moment—with a kind of violence, as it seemed to me ; then his aspect softened, and he said :

'You don't know what an unlucky beggar I am, Gertie. Do you believe in the porte malheur ?'

'No.'

'I do. The best thing that can happen to my friend is to see me no more.'

'That is why you tried to get rid of me so quickly this morning ?' said I.

'Perhaps. No good can come of our

being friends, but a good deal of harm. Well, that's settled!' he cried, with a change of tone. 'We will put in to Yarmouth, and you'll forsake that absurd notion of going to London.'

'No,' said I; 'I would go to London, if only to prevent the fulfilment of your threat. I don't want to say "good-bye for ever" to you.' The tears came into my eyes as I thought of this possibility; for in this short space of time I had come to like John Brown very much—perhaps because he filled that aching space in my heart which had been filled by the friends I left behind me in Neufbourg. It was like parting with them all over again, to think of seeing John Brown no more. But I was angry with myself for showing this emotion; and, stamping my foot pettishly, I cried, 'It is nonsense to believe in superstitions of that

sort! You are as wrong as the poor peasants you laughed at yesterday, and without their excuse. It is quite unreasonable to suppose that you can bring harm to your friends involuntarily; for it is only by doing wrong you can harm them.'

'But if one can't always do right, Gertie?' he said, with a mingling of tenderness and pleasantry in his voice.

'It is only feeble persons—women and children and sick persons—who cannot control their will. You,' said I, looking at him and wondering at his size and strength, 'you should be able to do just what you please.'

'Then it will please me to leave you at Yarmouth and take your book to London.'

'Mère Lucas must go back to her family.'

‘She can be replaced.’

‘You have doubts about papa’s book being accepted—you said so.’

‘For the sake of argument, I’ll undertake that the book shall be produced, and you well paid for it.’

‘At your own risk? Tell me—is not that your intention?’

‘That is my intention if the publishers are so foolish as to lose the opportunity of making money by it. I have ventured upon speculations a thousand times more hazardous than this.’

When I could bring myself to speak :

‘I don’t know how to thank you for your goodness. I didn’t think I should find such a friend so quickly, and my surprise and pleasure make a little fool of me,’ I said, turning away my head and dashing the stupid tears out of my eyes with my handkerchief. I got the

better of my feelings very quickly ; and then I said, as calmly as I could, 'But I will go to London and abide by the result. I went through all this when I decided to refuse the assistance of my friends over there. I don't want to be your pensioner. If the book is worth nothing, I must find some other means of earning a living. You wouldn't have me your dependent, would you?'

He did not respond directly ; but, after a little consideration, he said :

'I suppose I should be sorry if you consented. So to London you shall go, you brave, right-thinking, obstinate, good little person!'



CHAPTER VIII.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE GOES TO LONDON.

‘**S**O to London you shall go, you brave, right-thinking, obstinate, good little person!’

What has happened since John Brown said that to me? I can hardly tell distinctly, because of the multiplicity of things that have in turns occupied my mind. It is as if, after looking for some time into a kaleidoscope, one tried to set down what has met the eye: certain outlines of angles and stars and roses are remembered; but their details are all confused in the memory. I

remember that, when he had seated me in the railway-carriage, John Brown went to get my ticket, and I began to think how I should say good-bye to him, and that I had great ado to keep my tears down, though the words were yet unspoken. He came back, and took the seat opposite to me; and I could say nothing for watching the hand of the clock that was creeping towards the minute when he must get out and leave me.

‘A minute and a half,’ said I.

‘The guard will blow his whistle just before starting.’

Then I sat and listened for the sound, with great pain in my heart. Presently the guard whistled, and, holding out my hand, I tried to say good-bye, and could not.

‘Why, you dear little goose!’ he cried. ‘Do you think I’m going to let you find your way to London alone?’

At that moment the train moved, and, finding that he was really going with me, I was so moved with delight and gratitude that I caught hold of his hand with both mine, wanting, with all my heart, to lift it to my lips and kiss it.

And I remember how we went about London looking for an apartment in a cab, which, I think, is the most delightful thing in the world—the cab, I mean—to lean back in the comfortable seat and see the endless rows of bright shops and grand buildings, and the hurrying throngs of vehicles and people. But the whirl and hurry of everything confused my ideas; and certainly I must have lost myself completely had I attempted to find lodgings alone. I should have taken the first one we looked at, but it did not satisfy John Brown; and I believe we looked at a dozen before he decided that this might suit me.

It is in the corner of a square, on the third floor. There is a little circular enclosure of trees in the centre of the square; but the trees are very dirty and unhappy-looking, and there are no birds in them save sparrows. One thing this bustle and confusion did, which I am grateful for—it prevented my taking deeply to heart the final parting with John Brown. I had so much else to think of.

He promised to come and see me; and, oh, how I look for his coming! I am sure he will keep his promise, despite what he said about the advisability of our separating entirely. Every time the postman comes into the square, I watch him, hoping he will bring me a letter from my dear friend. He did not promise to write, but I cannot help hoping and expecting that he will. I received a letter from Mère Lucas on Friday; she got home quite safely and very quickly; and she says that John

Brown was very kind to her. It is odd that, in writing an account of what has happened to me since I left Neufbourg, I have so forgotten what concerns my dear old bonne; I suppose my ideas are still unsettled by the tumult of this wonderful city. I have written a long, long letter to her, and to my old friends at Neufbourg.

The day after my arrival, the landlady's daughter took me to the street where the *Anthropologist* was published; and it was strange to see how that child went composedly through the crowded streets, while I was like one dazed. It seemed as though I was the child and she the woman. But I found that another magazine is now published at the office, and the *Anthropologist*, I was told, is dead. So there was no possibility of getting advice from the editor. Thence I went to Mr. X., the publisher, and, as clearly as I could, told him the

object of my visit. He promised to look at the book and give me an answer on Wednesday. On that day I went to him and learnt that the 'Dictionary' is rather 'out of his line,' but that it would suit Messrs. A. and Co. So to them I went with the same story I had given Mr. X. The gentleman told me to go on Saturday for his reply; and yesterday I called upon him, to learn that it was not exactly in his way, but would most likely be taken by Mr. X.! When I told him that Mr. X. had sent me to him, he said I might try Mr. Z., in whose hands I yesterday left the volumes of MS. But my heart sinks as I think of the result of his consideration; and it seems to me quite clear now that John Brown perceived that the work was unsaleable. Each of the three publishers said they would print the book if I would take the risk; but all looked grave when they

heard I had no money. I wish I knew the worst.

It is very dull here. I spend the morning at the British Museum, but that does not delight me as it should ; and I fear I am a great dunce, and very dull to what is beautiful in antiquities. I ought to be quite happy in looking at the beautiful statues and the broken earthenware, and find endless amusement in the instructive collections ; but I wander about, and, half the time my eyes are fixed upon the fossils, I am thinking of the sea and recollecting my two days on the *Tub*, and the bright dancing waves and the sunlight ; and the sea-birds sweeping above the rocks come between my eyes and the fossils. I spend a good deal of time in the Egyptian department ; there is a mummy which fascinates me. What a little stupid I am ! John Brown called me a little goose ; but geese

are wiser than I, for wherever they go they seem content with the things they find. I suppose I look stupid, for I have remarked that everyone stares at me, especially the gentlemen. Some follow me about as if they thought I was one of the curiosities of the Museum. The young men have an unpleasant trick of going to the opposite side of a case I am examining and looking through it at me. Sometimes the attendants follow me and watch me, as if I was there with some wrong purpose.

I think I should like the Museum if any-one could explain the things to me kindly. How pleasantly John Brown would talk about them ! There seemed to be nothing in the sea or heavens about which he had not something agreeable to say.

I dare not go farther from the square than the Museum without Katie, my landlady's daughter ; and I do not like to ask

favours of Mrs. Thompson. She was very kind the first few days, but has been extremely uncivil and brusque since Wednesday. I have done nothing, to my knowledge, to offend her. So I stop at home a good deal, and read and write best part of the day. This morning I thought for the first time of my neglected diary—how it came to be forgotten so long I cannot tell—and I have spent the whole day in writing the events of the past eleven days, with such pleasure as I have not experienced since John Brown and I were sitting together in the cab. I am quite tired with writing—and sad too.

June 27th, 188—.—This has been a day of passionate anger and bitter humiliation for me. In the morning, when I rang the bell for Katie to take away my breakfast-things, Mrs. Thompson came up, and, having closed the door, said she would

thank me to suit myself with another lodging by the end of the week. I could see by her face that she was in an ill-temper —indeed, I had heard her quarrelling fiercely with her husband before he went to the office, where he is engaged during the day as a clerk, and, peeping over the balusters, I had caught sight of the librarian's wife on the second floor, and the artist, who uses the first floor as a studio, out on their landings listening to the storm below. But I saw no reason why her ill-temper should be the cause of my going, and I asked her for an explanation. She was evidently only waiting for that opportunity, and at once made a charge against me which fairly bewildered me. For some time I could not realize what she meant, or believe that we were both in our sound senses. She accused me of 'carrying on' — that was her expression — with her

husband ! If she had not been so fearfully in earnest, I think I should have laughed at this charge, for I certainly have never given two thoughts to Mr. Thompson ; and he is the last man in the world I should be likely to fall in love with, even if he were single, for he is a most miserable, thin, ugly man, and has a way of looking out of the corners of his eyes in a sly cowardly manner that would make any girl dislike him, I should think. She told me that she had had her suspicions from the first, as he had been a deal too kind in saving her the trouble of running up and down stairs, and that yesterday convinced her, as I had not been out of the house the whole day, and Thompson had done nothing from morning till night but run upstairs into the attics with some pretext or another. She said also that Mrs Flick had complained of my 'carry-ing on ' with her husband and Mr. Travers

the artist. I have observed that, whenever I go downstairs, Mr. Travers's door is open, and he is in sight. He has nodded to me, and, being his neighbour, as it were, I have thought it proper to bow in return. What else could I do? But, as to Mr. Flick, I declare I have only seen him once when he was with his wife; and a very feeble, ailing old gentleman he looked. I do not remember to have done anything even carelessly to provoke the jealousy of these two women. The more Mrs. Thompson talked, the more angry she grew. Finally she said it was easy to see what kind of a person I was by my having no employment, and living on a third floor; and that, if everything was known, she would dare to say that Thompson was not the only married man I was leading to destruction; that she had always borne a reputation for respectability, and did not

intend to lose it and get her house a bad name for ten shillings a week—the price I paid for my two rooms. There appears to me now something ridiculous in this woman's charge; but at the time it provoked my indignation to such a degree that, had she said another word, or remained in the room after I bade her leave it, I should have taken her by the shoulders and shaken her. I put on my bonnet at once, and, trembling with excitement, went out to find another apartment. By good fortune, I found one not many doors away, on the adjacent side of the square, in a house kept by a widow, who sympathized greatly with me, laughed heartily at Mrs. Thompson, and assured me I ran no risk of exciting the jealousy of any married lady in her house, as she took only single lodgers. I then returned to my first apartments and packed my boxes. After that, I wrote my

new address on a card, and, having paid Mrs. Thompson the week's rent she demanded, I gave her the card, instructing her to give it to Mr. Brown if he called. She took it without saying a word, being now as reticent as previously she had been voluble. But I do not think she will trouble herself to take care of it, or be just enough to give it to John Brown when he comes ; and this possibility I had in view when I took my new apartment, and for that reason would have none but a room from which I could see the street-door of Mrs. Thompson's house. I have been sitting at the window all day. I dare scarcely leave it for a minute, lest he should come in my absence. And now, though it is dark, and there is little possibility of his arriving to-day, I cannot hear the sound of wheels, or of a knock at a distant door, without going to peep across at the house I have left.

June 28.—Another day gone, and he has not come. I begin to feel the sickness of hope deferred, and with that a painful foreboding that I shall see John Brown no more. It has been raining all day, and everything looks sad and miserable, and just in harmony with my feelings. I have been thinking what I might do to earn money if papa's book is refused; and the consciousness of my inability to do anything especially well has helped to depress me. It is hard to believe that anyone should be gay in London on such a day as this, when there is not one single bright thing to be seen. It seems to rain smuts. The cuffs and collar I put on this morning are not fit to put on to-morrow. I might have worn them a week at Neufbourg, and still found them clean. A man with an organ came and played in the square this morning, but, much as I love music, I could

not find happiness in listening to him. There is a lady lives downstairs, and another over my head, and they were both singing this afternoon as though they found this the pleasantest place in the world. My own trouble makes me so miserably selfish that their gaiety is more painful to my ears than silence. I cannot fix my attention on a book—I cannot forget when I work—I can do nothing with satisfaction, and I am angry with myself.

June 29.—I received a visit from Miss Drelincourt, the lady who lives on the first floor, this morning. She is a very handsome young woman, with particularly dark eyebrows and red lips, and beautiful soft, fair hair, cut short like a boy's. She came in, after tapping at the door, and having looked hard at me for a moment, she crossed the room with a good natured smile and kissed me.

‘I’ve come to cheer you up a bit, dear,’ said she. ‘Don’t be astonished—there’s no harm in me. I hate all ceremony. The widow’—that is ‘our landlady—‘told me you were down on your luck, and did nothing but sit at the window moping over a book ; so I thought I had better come and talk to you than go upstairs to Kitty Burnes, who, I shouldn’t wonder, isn’t awake yet. One must talk to some one, you know. Which is the broken chair?’

I told her the chair in the corner had a leg that came out.

‘There always is a lame chair in lodgings,’ she explained, with a laugh ; ‘and I take precious good care to find him out before I attempt to seat myself!’

I had resumed my place by the window, not to lose sight of the house in the corner of the square ; and she seated herself opposite to me before it entered my head to ask

her to be seated. She wore a pink silk dressing-gown, rather the worse for wear, scarlet silk stockings, and a pair of decidedly dirty blue kid shoes, which she was at no pains to conceal, for, perfectly unconstrained, she leant back in her chair with her hands clasped over her knee, moving her foot with a little swinging motion that kept one shoe dangling from the toe-part.

‘What awful weather!’ she began. I noticed that she employed the strangest adjectives to express her feelings. ‘It’s enough to give anyone the blues. Kitty and me got wet through last night coming home from the theatre. Not a cab to be had, let alone a ’bus. If it don’t hold up I shall book a two-wheeler to fetch me. It won’t run to that every night, you know.’

‘You go often to the theatre?’ I ventured to say.

‘Rather! I’m a pro, don’t you know! So’s Kitty. I’m at the Gaiety; she’s at the Globe. You’ll like her; she’s just one of your sort. Very pretty, but as quiet as a mouse. You’d never think she could go on the stage, to see her off it. But it isn’t the rackets ones who have the most courage. Look at me—you’d think I was bold enough for anything, wouldn’t you? Well, I’ll take my oath I was ready to drop through the boards the first time I sneaked on in a back row.’

‘It must be very pleasant to be an actress when one has ability and courage as well.’

‘Oh, it’s a jolly life, whatever people may say! And I don’t know what girl would stick in a milliner’s shop if she could get on at a theatre. I was at a milliner’s in Regent Street once. Kitty was in a bar. There you are, don’t you know! You’d never think such a genteel girl would go in

a bar. 'You'll be astonished. She's just as ladylike as you to look at.'

'I don't see why an actress should not be a lady,' I said, feeling a little annoyed. Then, to turn the subject, I asked Miss Drelincourt if she played in Shakespeare's plays.

'Not much,' she replied, with considerable emphasis.

'Only occasionally?' I suggested.

She burst out laughing.

'Fancy me doing the heavy business!' she exclaimed. 'Not me! Half a dozen speaking-lines, and any amount of chorus, that's my form!'

She talked about her profession and Kitty Burnes for some time, and then asked me if I would go with her to the theatre in the evening, promising to pass me in to see 'the show' from the front, or to take me into the dressing-room, whichever pleased

me. I thanked her for this kindness—indeed, despite a certain degree of levity and, I think I may add, vulgarity, she is an agreeable and most amiable girl—and told her I could not go, because I expected a visitor.

‘Ah,’ said she, ‘I know all about that! Spooky Travers told me about the row at Mother Thompson’s. That woman’s mad, I believe. When Travers and I were on nodding terms, she came here and kicked up no end of a row because she had caught her husband spending his Sunday at the attic window. A little insignificant wretch! I wouldn’t look at him through the wrong end of an opera-glass! You’re quite right in looking out for your friend, for of course Mrs. Thompson won’t tell him where you are. You think he’ll come—do you, dear?’

‘I hope so.’

‘Oh, of course! One always does hope

as long as possible. Don't you know where he lives?'

'I think he lives in his ship.'

'He's a sailor?'

'Not an ordinary sailor. The ship belongs to him, and I think he sails in it for pleasure.'

'Pity to lose him,' she said reflectively. 'What shall you do if he don't come, dear?'

'I hardly know. I think I shall have to find some employment. I scarcely know what I can do. I have no special talent.'

'Then I should advise you to try the stage. They don't bother much about talent so long as you are pretty and have some sort of a voice. I'll get you on, I know. You can come into our dressing-room first of all, and see how you like the girls. I'll do all I can to make it easy for you.'

'That's very, very good of you,' said I.

‘Come with me to-night. We’ll have a cab from the door.’

‘No, no. My friend promised he would come.’

‘Oh, they’ll promise anything, my dear! But they forget their promises, or think better of ’em as soon as you’re out of sight.’

‘I am sure he will keep his promise,’ I said quickly.

‘Well, I hope he will, for that will show he’s better than most men. If he does—you take my advice—coax him to take you with him.’

I don’t know whether she intended what her words conveyed to my mind at that moment. She said she meant no harm when I asked her angrily to explain what she meant by that advice; but she turned the subject awkwardly, seeing how uncomfortable she had made me, and soon after

left me. And I have seen nothing of her nor of her friend Miss Burnes since, though I heard their voices humming an hour afterwards in the room overhead. When the humming sound of their voices ceased, I did not hear Miss Drelincourt's foot upon the stairs; and now they are gone to their theatre. I can scarcely see to write. I must light my lamp, and so cease to hope for the rest of——

He has come! I am too happy to write more than that to-night. I want to think.



CHAPTER IX.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE'S GREAT HAPPINESS.

JULY 4.—I have five days to write about, for my happiness has been so great that I have been quite unable to compose my thoughts into words.

In the middle of that sentence I heard the sound of wheels. A cab ran along the farther side of the square and stopped before Mrs. Thompson's door. I stood up and strained my eyes to see who had come. In those minutes of suspense I do not think I drew a single breath. The doors

were thrown open with a clatter, and *he* stepped out. There was no mistaking his great manly figure and fair beard. For a minute after, I could not move—my legs shook under me; I had to cling to the curtains for support. I felt as if in a terrible dream, where one sees a beloved soul in imminent peril without having the power to stretch out a helping hand. The cab turned round and moved slowly away, and I saw John Brown ascend the steps and lift the knocker. The sound of it seemed to awaken me; and, with a cry of terror, lest he should be gone before I reached him, I flew out of the room and down the stairs. I did not understand the fastenings of the street-door, and for another minute I stood wrenching at the handles and bolts one after another in inexpressible excitement. The landlady came, wondering, I dare say, at my frenzy.

I do not know what I said to her, but, after a moment or two of delay, she opened the door with a touch, and I ran out into the road and through the drizzling rain without any covering. I heard Mrs. Thompson's door close with a sharp bang, and I saw John Brown thrust his hands in his pockets and turn about in perplexity.

‘I am here—I am here!’ I cried.

And the next moment I rushed up to him, gasping and sobbing with emotion. I think I must have fallen if he had not held me up with his strong hands.

‘Where have you sprung from, you poor little thing?’ he asked.

I pointed across the square to where my landlady stood looking across at us.

‘Take my arm, like a sensible young woman,’ he said.

And I obeyed, and we walked so to my new apartments. And there I fell to laugh-

ing and chatting like a mad thing; and I broke my lamp-glass in a clumsy attempt to put it on after John Brown had lighted the wick with a wax vesta. I got my bedroom candle and lit that; and I was ashamed of the miserable light and the broken glass on the floor, and my wild untidy look. He said very little, but he never took his eyes off me, I thought, and that added to my confusion. I was so afraid he would pity me. But when he spoke, it was only to ask if I had dined.

‘Yes, I think so,’ said I. ‘In London people dine at one o’clock, and eat bread-and-butter about dinner-time. But, if you are hungry, I will send out for something; only my landlady is not a good cook, and there is no stove that I can use, and the chops are fried in grease, and I don’t think you will like them.’

‘I don’t think I should. Put on your bonnet, Gertie, and we will go out and find something nice to eat.’

‘Yes, yes!’ I cried, laughing—I cannot tell why; I felt just as ready to cry. ‘But I don’t like to leave you in the dark, and this room is so different to your cabin.’

Just then the landlady came with a lamp, having ‘heerd’ me break the glass, she said; and, smiling inclusively at John Brown, asked if he would take a bottle of ‘hale’ or some ‘Irish,’ which she always ‘kep’ in the ‘ouse.’

‘I will take your lamp, madam, but nothing more,’ said John Brown; and, with that, he made my landlady a bow which seemed to frighten her out of the room. ‘I shall not grow impatient,’ he said to me, when I promised I would not keep him long.

‘There is a guide to the British Museum, if you would like to read something,’ said I.

‘Thanks, dear,’ he said, in his tender parental tone. It was the first time he had called me ‘dear,’ but the word made my heart leap up within me. ‘What’s this?’ he asked, turning to the quire of paper I had been writing.

‘My diary—part of it. I was writing it when I heard the wheels of your cab.’

‘Your diary—the chronicle of your acts and thoughts. It would save a lot of explanation if I might glance over the history of the past eight or ten days.’

‘You may,’ said I. ‘You may do what you like.’

He put his hand upon my head, and stroked back the hair that had got loose and fallen over my forehead. I could not see his face for the tears that sprang into

my eyes. He said nothing for a minute, and then :

‘Run away, Gertie, and put on your bonnet.’

I left him, and went into my bedroom with the intention of putting on my bonnet as he bade me, and getting back again without delay ; but I found I had splashed my dress with grey mud, and covered my boots and a good deal of my stockings as well with filth in running across the square so heedlessly, wherefore I had to take off these things, and I was not ill-pleased to put on my little shoes and my best dress, though it kept me longer than I wished in my bedroom.

When I came back to my sitting-room, I found John Brown sitting where I had left him, with my diary on his knee, but his head turned towards the window. He must have been in deep thought, for it was

quite dark, and there was nothing to be seen now outside.

‘Ah, now you look yourself again!’ he said, rising and looking at me as he heard me close my door. ‘I’ve read this. Put it away, and lock it up. Are you ready to start?’

‘Yes—quite.’

‘How are you about the feet?’

I pulled back my skirts and showed my shoes. He did not look in the least displeased, although they were ‘young-ladyish,’ in my opinion.

‘There’s one advantage about those shoes, Gertie, they’ll keep your heels dry,’ he said, laughing. ‘Can you walk in them to the other side of the square?’

‘I could dance in them.’

‘I’m glad to hear it, with all my heart. You couldn’t have danced in them or any other shoes half an hour ago, if I judge

the confessions in your diary rightly. Come along ; we will dance away the rest of this day, at any rate.'

So we went out, I with my hand under his arm ; and upon the other side of the square we got into a delicious cab with dazzling lamps, and were whisked away amongst hundreds of other gleaming lights and hurrying cabs, and I could say nothing but 'yes' and 'no' when he spoke ; but I put my hand under his arm and kept it there, just as if we had been walking along. Then, amongst all the brilliant lights from the street-lamps and shops, I saw—for the first time, I think—that London, even on a rainy evening, is indeed a gay city, and a pleasant one to be in. We dined in the most beautiful room I have ever seen, where the tables glittered with silver and crystal, and were beautiful with flowers and hundreds of lights. We had a little table all to

ourselves, and, though I could not eat much, I enjoyed the dinner exceedingly. Afterwards we got into another cab, and went to a theatre. There I felt as if I had been transported into fairyland, for the wonders of it surpass all imagining. An opera was being played upon the stage—‘Don Giovanni.’ We were not in time for the beginning, and so I hardly know what the story was, especially as it was all in Italian, of which language, I am sorry to say, I know nothing at all. But John Brown said it was a good thing not to understand the words, for they spoilt the enjoyment of the music. Of course he was right ; still, they must have been very bad indeed to have robbed those melodies of their charm for my ear. There was a solo and a trio which sent a thrill right through me, and filled my heart with the most tender emotions. I forgot everything, even

John Brown, as I listened ; and, at the end of the trio, I found that I had risen from my seat and was standing upright. No doubt I behaved strangely in other respects without knowing it, for between the acts I saw many people looking at me through their opera-glasses, and the old gentleman who sat upon my left hand was looking at me and chuckling whenever I glanced that way.

John Brown did not take me back to the square.

‘I don’t intend to let you go there again,’ was all he said upon the subject ; and, after my late experiences, I was only too willing to submit to his decision, feeling how helpless I was.

He took me to an hotel not far from the theatre, where a pleasant chambermaid led me to a handsome apartment of two rooms and a toilet-chamber, after I had said ‘good-night’ to John Brown.

When we were taking breakfast together the next morning, he said :

‘ Now, Gertie, let us talk about business. Tell me what you have done about the “ Dictionary.” ’

I told him all that the publishers had said to me about it, and that I ought to have gone to see Mr. Z. the morning before.

‘ And why didn’t you go ? ’ he asked.

‘ Because I was afraid of losing you,’ I replied.

‘ And supposing you have lost a fortune by looking out for me ? ’ he asked, gazing across the table at me.

I thought that I would far rather lose the fortune than John Brown, and I was just about to tell him so, feeling wonderfully happy and careless, when it struck me that perhaps I ought not to let him know how much I liked him ; so, after looking at him

in confusion for a minute, I dropped my eyes, feeling the colour rush into my face, for I did not know what to say if I could not tell the truth just as it stood in my mind.

‘Well, we’ll go and see Mr. Z. together,’ he said, ‘and find out definitely what the fate of the book is to be. Do you want anything before starting?’

‘I’ve no tooth-brush ; and I want clean cuffs and collar.’

‘Some one shall go with you to buy what you want, while I settle another little matter of business. When that’s done, we’ll go to our publisher’s.’

The chambermaid went out with me, and, having found that John Brown really did not object to pretty things, I bought a new bonnet and a pair of lovely gloves with six buttons, and several other things which I needed. It was fully an hour

before I got back to the hotel, though how so long a space passed without my knowing it I could not imagine.

‘I have settled with your landlady,’ said John Brown, when I came down from my room ; ‘and your boxes will be brought here this afternoon. Now, if you’re ready, we’ll be off. The cab’s at the door.’

It seemed to me quite natural that he should take my affairs in hand, and I did not attempt to argue with him as to the advisability of leaving the square. To tell the truth, I was more concerned at the moment as to what he would think of my new bonnet and gloves.

We went to the publisher. His manner was much more deferential to John Brown than it had been when I was alone. I have observed that John Brown’s presence obtains respect from everyone ; even the rude men in the street, who would push

me off the pavement if I did not make way for them, got out of his way—wisely, no doubt, for very few could have pushed him an inch from his path. But the publisher said he must beg to decline the work so kindly placed at his disposal; it was not precisely—— John Brown waited long enough for him to finish the sentence; but as he only made a little gesture and smiled very blandly, John Brown said :

‘Not precisely what, sir?’

‘Not precisely in my way,’ replied the publisher, looking very ill at ease.

‘Why did not you say so when it was offered you?’

‘Oh, I do occasionally publish works of this kind, and, had it been by a well-known writer, or strikingly original in design and execution, I might have ventured to produce it ! But, even under those conditions, the risk would have been enormous.’

‘Would you publish it if you were secured against loss?’

‘Not without a distinct understanding that I should be held free from moral as well as substantial responsibility for its failure.’

John Brown turned to me, and raised his eyebrows.

‘Papa made a mistake,’ I said.

‘Undoubtedly,’ said the publisher. ‘There is no class of intelligent men so prone to make mistakes from a business point of view as literary men. I say nothing whatever to disparage the “Dictionary;” the author may be as correct as Euclid and as talented as Buckle, but he did wrong to devote his attention to such a work as this. He is not alone in this. I could take you to the British Museum and point out a dozen men of undoubted ability and acknowledged learning who are literally

starving because they *will* use their brains to a wrong purpose.'

'From a business point of view,' said John Brown curtly. 'Be good enough, if you please, to have these packets brought out to my cab.'

It seemed as if nothing could dishearten me now ; and, as soon as we were in the cab and moving, I forgot the pang of regret I had felt for my dear father's wasted life. As for the failure of the book, so far as it concerned my prospects, that did not distress me in the least. John Brown seemed much more unhappy than I.

'Shall we try another publisher, Gertie?' he asked.

'No,' I said ; 'we have tried the best. It would be only waste of time and a source of little worries and disappointments if we went to all the rest, one after the other. Mr. Z. was quite right, perhaps.'

‘What shall you do?’ he asked, after looking gloomily at the street before us for some time in silence.

‘I think I could teach children, if they were not too clever.’

‘I don’t think I care greatly for that suggestion. Try another.’

‘I fancy I might learn to be a good nurse in time. There are a great many hospitals, aren’t there?’

‘Oh, lots!’

‘If I hadn’t to look at any very dreadful operations.’

‘Try again, Gertie.’

I thought for a few minutes, and then I said :

‘What do you think of my going into a bar?’

He turned his head and looked at me in blank astonishment; then—

‘Good heavens!’ said he. ‘What put that notion into your head?’

‘Kitty Burnes was in a bar, and Miss Drelincourt says I am just like her.’

‘Miss Drelincourt made a very great mistake. You’re not at all like Kitty Burnes, and never can be, thank heaven! You behind a bar!’ he exclaimed. And then he burst out into a loud laugh.

After that I dared not suggest going into a milliner’s, because that had been Miss Drelincourt’s business; but I hinted that I could use a needle very well.

‘I suppose the best thing, after all, will be governessing,’ said he; ‘but you’ll find it a horrid kind of life, Gertie.’

‘You don’t think I expect to be always happy, as I am now?’

‘The majority of girls think that’s all they’re born for.’

‘Ah, they are young ladies,’ said I.

‘Yes, that’s just what they are—young ladies,’ he said bitterly ; and then I recollected his repugnance.

‘And you think you should like to teach children as well as anything?’ he asked soon after.

‘Better than anything else,’ I replied.

‘Then we will take the first steps at once.’

He thrust up the little trap-door in the top of the cab and said, ‘Printing House Square,’ to the driver, who turned his horse round and drove in a different direction.

When the cab stopped again, John Brown got out, and, after being absent for about five minutes, he came back and told me that to-morrow morning the world would know that I wished to be a governess, explaining to me that he had put an advertisement in the *Times*.

‘ Lombard Street,’ he said to the driver ; and away we went again.

At Lombard Street he went into a bank, and stopped for nearly ten minutes. As he came from the bank to the cab, he was followed and overtaken by a little stout gentleman with a shaven fat red face and very stiff shirt-collar. They spoke a few words, shook hands, and separated.

After luncheon we went out for a walk, the afternoon being beautifully fine and bright, and looked at the shops, which was a very great pleasure to me, but must have been rather tedious to him ; though he showed no signs of impatience, and actually made me stop to look at some bonnets, which could not possibly be of any interest to him. But in little things, just as much as in great, he was generously considerate of my happiness, I found. Then we entered a picture-gallery, which opened a new field

of wonder and delight to my mind ; and I thought I could stay there for ever, and talk with John Brown about the beautiful things we saw, without growing tired ; but I found that my head ached by the time we left to go to dinner. I said nothing about it ; but his quick eye detected what I wished to conceal.

‘ You are tired, Gertie, said he. ‘ Do you want to see your beloved fields and breathe the pure air again?’

‘ I want nothing,’ I said.

‘ Nothing?’

I shook my head. I was not forgetful of the friends I loved at Neufbourg ; yet I thought how wretched I should feel to be transported to that still village and begin again the old life, with its dull routine of little duties, its irritating jealousies, its petty prejudices, and purposeless existence.

‘Nevertheless, I think we will spend to-morrow among the water-lilies.’

To be in the country with John Brown—that was another thing. I started from my chair—we were dining in the private room—and clasped my hands with delight. He saw how pleased I was, and smiled.

‘Come here, Gertie,’ he said, in a tone of fervent tenderness.

I put my serviette on the table, and went round to his side, wondering what he wanted me for. But his manner changed suddenly, and, pushing back his chair, he rose, turned his back upon me, and looked to the open window.

‘Fetch my pipe, Gertie—it’s on the chimney-piece, I think,’ he said, almost harshly.

We went out on the balcony, he smoking his pipe, and we looked down and watched the people flowing in an endless stream

along the street below, and gradually we came to talk in our usual unconstrained way about what we saw. But it was a long while before I ceased to wonder what had passed in his mind while I was in the course of going to his side, and why he wished me to go to him, and then why his tone so suddenly changed. Even now I cannot understand it.

A waiter came while we were on the balcony, to know if he should light the gas.

‘Yes,’ said John Brown. ‘And now, Gertie, as you had better be up and dressed by eight to-morrow morning, go to bed now.’

‘Are we going in the country?’ I asked, with some hesitation.

‘Yes; there’ll be no answer to the advertisement to-morrow. After to-morrow, there’s no knowing what may happen; the

holiday will be ended, and your troubles taking a new departure perhaps. Good-night.'

He gave me his hand without changing his attitude, and kept his pipe, the only thing he has which I dislike, between his teeth.

I suppose it was the aching of my head that depressed me; but certainly I felt sad and disappointed as I went to my room.

Yesterday we went to Pangbourne, a little village on the Thames, where the river is more lovely than anything 'at Neufbourg, or between there and Noailles. We had luncheon at a lovely little inn, quite unlike the dirty auberges in Normandy, where you must eat at a table without cloth, and with your own pocket-knife. Everything was clean and fresh and quaint; and through the open window we could look at the river bordered by beautiful

trees that hung right over the water, and see the ducks swimming among the rushes, and the boats lying all ready for us to choose from, and the leaves of the convolvulus, trained up the window, swaying gently in the soft air that just tempered the heat of the blazing sun. Oh, it was beautiful indeed! And there was a lovely currant and raspberry pie, which made me feel that, with all my skill in cookery, I had a great deal to learn yet, for nothing I have ever made or eaten in France could at all compare with that pie. The wasps must have smelt it from a long way off, for they came in with a buzz and a hum one after the other, just as I have seen Mère Aumont's children come running home from school to dinner, Laocadie first, because of her long legs ; and then Virginie ; and, after her, the rest according to their age.

If I told all that happened during the day, I should not finish writing to-day nor to-morrow either. We had the prettiest little boat I could find—for John Brown left the choice to me—but not the smallest, for I feared that his great weight would surely sink it; and I was told how to steer by pulling the little ropes attached to the rudder; but I could not think of them for two minutes together, for every stroke of the oars brought some new beauty of the river into sight, and I could think of that only. If John Brown had not been accustomed to ships, I fancy we should have been run ashore very often; but he kept the boat straight despite me, and could do just whatever he wished to do. I found some most beautiful large white water-lilies, and it seemed a shame to pull them up out of the water which they made to look so lovely; but I took

some, all the same. And then I rowed. At first I made a dreadful business of it; but, after a while, under John Brown's guidance, I got to row without hurting my knuckles, and the banks ceased to go the wrong way—a little. We were very happy and gay. While I was rowing, John Brown, who sat in the back seat and could look up the river, exclaimed suddenly :

‘Oh, damme!’ and then, pulling his jacket, which hung on the back of the seat, over his head, as if to shield his face from the sun, he said, ‘Pull away steadily, Gertie—a little harder with your right.’

The next minute a long narrow boat shot past, rowed by three ladies and three gentlemen, and steered by a fourth gentleman. The ladies were dressed in white flannel, with blue trimmings and straw hats. They looked very hard at me, and

the gentleman steering turned round when they had passed.

‘ Let me know when they’re out of sight,’ said John Brown.

It was clear that he knew the people, and I think the gentleman had recognised him, and that all suspected who he was. This made me feel very uncomfortable for a time, thinking that John Brown was ashamed of me in my poor black frock ; but I think I did him wrong to suspect that, and that it was only his strange horror of young ladies which made him anxious to escape observation.

We went as far as a village called Streatly, and, after resting there some time, we returned ; and I rowed nearly the whole distance, having got accustomed to the use of the oars, and liking the exercise extremely. It was much easier going down, moreover, as there was no disagreeable

current to twist the boat in among the reeds and catch hold of the oar when one did not expect anything of the kind. The sun was setting as we reached Pangbourne; the air was clear and still, and a delicious mellow light softened the view. High up in the air swallows were skimming with sharp cries; a few swept swiftly over the water, touching it with their breasts, fluttering upwards, and away; gnats gave promise of a fine day to-morrow; the ducks were still busy amongst the reeds; there was a sound of falling water that came from the weir; there was a smell of wild-thyme and new hay—there was something to delight every sense.

I slept in a sweet little chamber, with a low ceiling and a latticed window that looked out towards the mill. In the morning, quite early, I was awoke by the swallows. They had a row of nests built

under the eaves, and from each a little black head peeped out through the hole in the side; and there was a great deal of noise when the parent with a sharp cry swept up to the side, and, clinging for a moment, conveyed the insects he had caught to his hungry family within, and then darted off again for a fresh supply. The river looked very soft and grey, with a thin veil of mist spread over the water. No one was moving, and I was wondering whether I should dress, when a church clock struck four. I crept into bed and fell asleep. When I woke again, the sun was shining through the window; and now, as I peeped out of the window, I found that the mist was gone, and everything stood out sharp and clear, and particularly bright and happy-looking. The swallows were still very busy. There were sawyers at work near—I could hear the long sweep of the

saw through the timber; and a man was mopping out the boat we had used the day before, while the ducks foraged round and about for the morsels of biscuit I had let fall in the boat. Then a hen came into sight, leading her brood of eleven little yellow chicks, which were just old enough to be tiresome—they *would* lag behind and get through palings that did not easily admit of their return, and lose themselves in the long grass of a paddock, where they cried distressfully for their mother, who seemed perversely disposed to seek in the most barren places for food, and, having scratched up a cloud of dust, would begin to peck vigorously and call loudly to her young ones, who seemed wise enough to understand that she was making a great fuss about nothing.

I wanted to get dressed, yet I could not get away from the window, until I caught

sight of John Brown coming down the hill with great strides. Then I felt ashamed of my laziness, and lost not another moment in dressing. I went down into the room below, where the snowy white table-cloth was spread and the breakfast-things laid out—large cups and saucers of homely earthenware, and forks with steel prongs, but all very bright and clean, and a big brown loaf that made me hungry to look at it. The window was open, and a wholesome fresh breeze wafted the hanging foliage of the convolvulus and one or two great purple blooms, just opened, to and fro. The good-looking fresh-coloured old landlord came and asked me if I would have the bacon cooked, and I said ‘Yes, by all means,’ thinking of my own hunger rather than of John Brown’s convenience—as I told him afterwards. I leaned on the sill of the open window, and looked at the lovely

river covered with a ripple that set the boats dancing gaily; and, while I leant there, with an inexpressible feeling of gratitude and happiness in my heart, John Brown came up on the outside with a pleasant smile on his handsome open face. His head only came as high as the window-sill, and he had to look up at me as he said good-morning. He looked handsomer than ever that way, I thought; and I would have given the world to put my arms round his neck and kiss him as I used to kiss my dear father. And I don't think he would have objected either, for his expression had all that was sweet and amiable in it as I looked at him, with this wish in my heart.

‘If you were only my sister!’ he said softly, still holding my hand.

‘And if you were only my brother!’ I thought; but I dare not say so. And my face flushed and my heart beat, and a

number of thoughts rushed into my head that made it giddy. Why should there be constraint between us just because we happened not to be of one mother? I thought. Why, if I love him like the dearest brother, and he loves me like a sister—why should we not say so and kiss? That seemed so natural at the moment; yet the very thought of his kissing my lips made me tremble so that I knew it must be somehow wrong. He put his lips to my hand, and let it go, turning his head away and looking up the shining river in silence. Just then the landlord bustled into the room and set down a tray; and, as I turned, I smelt a delightful odour of coffee and toasted bacon that turned my thoughts in a new direction.

‘Oh, come in quick!’ I said to John Brown. ‘The breakfast is served, and I am so hungry!’

I think I ate almost as much as he—which is saying a great deal for my appetite—and there was no further constraint between us ; but we laughed and talked as much as eating and drinking would allow—he telling me of what he had seen in his walk, and I describing to him the ways of the young chicks and their mother, and the never-tiring swallows. After breakfast we took the boat and rowed down to a place called, I think, Maple Durham, where some artists, with white umbrellas over them, were painting. And I do not wonder that they chose that spot, for it is extremely beautiful.

After an early dinner at Pangbourne, we bade the dear little village of Pangbourne good-bye, and took the train to London. John Brown thought I should be grieved to go back to London ; but I was not, for it seemed to me that wherever I went with

him I must be happy—the happiness differing only in kind. Nevertheless, I was sad before the day was over.

At the hotel a letter was given to me. This is a copy of it :

‘Gauntly House, Camden Square, N.’
(*Printed in gold letters.*)

‘Mrs. Gauntly Gower’—written in a very scratchy angular large hand, about three words in a line—‘having seen Miss Graham’s advertisement in this morning’s *Times*, will be pleased to see her at the above address with regard to instructing her children in the French language, *et cætera*, between the hours of twelve and three o’clock to-morrow or the day following.

‘*July 1st, 188—.*’

I handed the note to John Brown in silence, my heart sinking at the thought of

separating from him, which was, of course, unreasonable and wrong ; but I could not help it.

‘ If the mamma can take some lessons in English from you amongst the *et cætera*, it won’t be amiss,’ he said, throwing the note on the table. ‘ Well, Gertie, you’d better go to-morrow and see if you like the engagement ; but don’t let the old woman impose upon you. I know what she means by *et cætera*—doing work that she ought to employ some one else to do. Ask her what she means by that *et cætera* ; and let her know that, if you accept the post of governess, you will do only that which a governess does. And don’t let her know anything about your private affairs. There’s no bounds to the curiosity of that woman—of a woman, that is, who writes in such a style as that. She’ll ask a hundred thousand questions, and never

stop until she has turned you inside out, or is quietly snubbed.'

'What can she ask me?'

'Oh,' he replied, with an uneasy, impatient air, 'I dare say she'll want to know what you have been doing since you came to London—how you came, who you know, and all the rest of it!'

'That's natural,' said I; 'and I don't see why I should not tell her.'

'She'll insult you if you do, and refuse to take you as well.'

'Why?' I asked in astonishment. 'I have done nothing wrong.'

'Of course not; but perhaps I have. In the opinion of the little world you propose to enter, it is highly improper for a young woman to receive any sort of help from a man.'

'I know it is thought so in Neufbourg; but papa always laughed at those restric-

tions, and said that they did not exist in England.'

'I don't think your father knew much about modern society in London. I don't care to talk about these things to you; they make me sick. I should like you to be forever as innocent and ignorant as you are now.'

'My ignorance makes me feel very helpless. What shall I say to this lady? I can't tell lies—you wouldn't have me do that?'

'I would rather your lips were silent for ever than guilty of falsehood. Damme,' he exclaimed, turning aside with impatience, 'I told you I should do you no good! Look here, Gertie—there's no need to mention my name at all. Tell her as much as you like about the "Dictionary" and your failure in selling it. Say you have been staying at this hotel, and that if she desires further

particulars respecting your career, the most satisfactory means will be to write to the Curé of Neufbourg and Madame Piquois for particulars. And then you can draw yourself up at a full stop, and decline to say anything more on the subject.'

With that he sauntered to the window, and I went up to my room to take off my bonnet and things. I made haste to rejoin John Brown; for, in the first place, realizing that in all probability we must soon separate, I begrudged every moment that was spent away from him; and next, I felt that, if I gave myself time to think of that parting, I should cry, which was what I wished with all my heart to avoid, fearing that he would misunderstand me, and attribute my grief to the discovery that his friendship had compromised me in the opinion of society. Just as much I feared that he should understand me, and see that

I was like a child over-excited with pleasure, and broken-hearted to think that happiness cannot exist for ever.

I did my utmost to be gay and light-hearted that evening. We sat near the window that opened upon the balcony. The lamp, deeply shaded, cast a circle of light which did not reach us ; the reflection from the street was sufficient to show me his face. A little table was between us, on which our coffee-cups stood. He smoked and I talked. He was thoughtful and silent. It is quite likely my perpetual chatter about little things wearied him ; but I talked with a kind of desperation—just as, when the clouds are heavy, the wind seems to be trying its utmost to prevent the rain from falling. The shops on the opposite side of the way shut up ; the throng of vehicles diminished ; and it grew so quiet that we heard Big Ben strike the hour.

‘Time to say “Good-night,” Gertie,’ he said.

I rose, fearing I knew not what, and held out my hand to him. He took it, and, holding it tenderly, said :

‘You will go to-morrow and see about that engagement?’

‘Yes.’

‘I suppose you will take up your residence in Camden Square at once—in a week or ten days, say—if you accept?’

I nodded my head. I could not speak now. My courage was all gone.

‘You will be quite safe here. I shall speak to the manageress and see that you are not neglected.’

‘Are you going away—soon?’ I asked, my voice sounding strange to my own ear.

‘To-night. If you fail to get that place, or if you feel in need of help, send me a few words by telegraph—“John Brown,

Marine Hotel, Dover," will find me. But you are going to be a brave girl, Gertie, and carry out your idea of being independent—eh?" I had dropped my eyes from his face, and a tear was trickling down my cheek. 'Otherwise I shall believe more firmly than ever that I bring evil to those whom I most desire to see happy.'

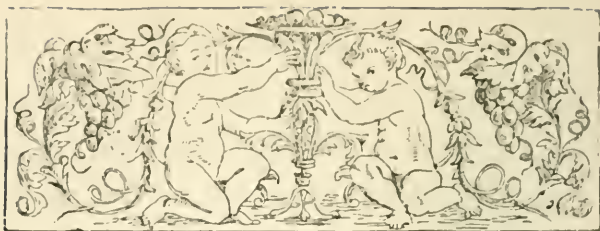
'I will be brave,' I said, gulping down a sob. 'And, oh, please don't think that anything but happiness and good will come by your seeing me sometimes!'

'That's what I want to think ; so good-night.'

I turned away, saying 'Good-bye,' but my voice was hardly audible; and, as I walked from him to the door, the recollection of all his kindness from the first day of our meeting passed in a flash of thought through my mind ; and then I felt what trouble would have befallen me but for his

help, and how terrible this beautiful city would have been without him ; and thereat my conscience reproached me with ingratitude, for I had parted without giving him even a word of acknowledgment. I could not bear to think of his going away and leaving me with all that debt unpaid, and I turned about that very moment and ran back to where he stood, meaning to say something suitable ; but when I was before him I could find never a word to say, but stood there looking up into his face, like the dumb creatures that can do no more than that to express the love they feel for their masters. Suddenly every consideration broke down before the resistless rush of my heart's desires, and I flung my arms around his neck and held my mouth up to be kissed. And he kissed my lips twice, and then, having gently disengaged my arms, led me by the hand to the door, and bade

me 'Good-night' for the second time.
And I went up to my room in the dark,
and cried there as if my heart would break
with too much joy.



CHAPTER X.

THE DIARY.—A NEW LIFE.

I KNOW now that I am a woman ;
I only thought so before, when
in reality I was still a child. I
love! Oh, I could write those words a
hundred times, and yet feel pride and
delight in repeating them! Love must be
the beginning of womanhood—indeed, I
think it is the true beginning of life, for
hitherto I have seemed to exist without
purpose, a very unnecessary young person,
the source of much anxiety to my father,
and of so little to the rest of the world that

my best friend would have mourned my death but little more than the loss of a pet bird. I knew nothing of love, except a very vague notion I had got by reading books. A blind girl might get just as true an idea of stars and the young moon by the mere description of them. Girls older than I never talk of love before their marriage—and very little afterwards—in Neufbourg. Clara Chenoux only saw her Monsieur Pitou three times before she became his wife; and I know she never felt for one instant towards him as I do towards John Brown, or else she would not have wished that he looked less like a weaver and more like a bourgeois. I think if John Brown had any defect I should like him the better for it. It seemed to me that love was like chivalry, a beautiful sentiment of past times, greatly exaggerated by poets of the present. Men

and women never did anything generous or noble for love at Neufbourg. There's nothing noble in patching blouses, and that is the best the women did for their husbands; and it is not generous to give a wife just as many sous as will buy the necessary things at market; but the best of husbands gave her no more, and if she had not cheated him, she would never have had money to buy anything at a bargain when it was offered. I suppose I should have fallen in love at Neufbourg if there had been anyone there really worth loving, for I am sure no one was ever more inclined that way than I. No story was ever perfect, in my opinion, unless there was a great deal about love in it; and I liked or disliked heroines in proportion as their conduct approached what I thought I should have done under the same conditions. I was a mistress of the theory of

love, but I regarded it only as theory—very much as I took for granted the movements of certain heavenly bodies only to be seen through a long telescope. When I ceased to speculate as to whether fairies and elves really existed or not, I began to wonder whether I should fall in love and be wretched for a time, or marry some one I did not care very much about, and grow indifferent to love, like Clara Chenoux; and, just as I had given up fairies as a hopeless improbability, so I came to look upon myself as a most unlikely heroine of romance. But now all that is changed, and that which was but romance is now reality. I love; and I know that love is not a mere dream, but a beautiful passion, that inspires one with the ambition to be in the highest degree good, and the resolution to do right always, and the courage to suffer, if need be. I am sure

that men and women may become heroic through love ; for even I, though but an ordinary girl, feel that there is no danger I would shrink from to serve him I love, nothing in the world I would not give up for his sake.

It was when our lips met that I first noticed the nature of my love for him. I mistook the feeling which made me return to him—it was more than gratitude ; that was why I was dumb, there being no words that could express what I felt. In the morning I had fancied I should like of all things to be his brother, or a man, that I might be his comrade and friend ; but at night I saw how poor an exchange I should have made for my womanhood and its dearer ties. I think he must have perceived that I loved him before I knew it myself. That is very likely ; it explains his sudden departure.

He has been always so thoughtful of my happiness that he would not have left me at this moment had he not seen that it was for my welfare he should go. He said to himself perhaps, 'This friendless child has fallen in love with me because I have been kind to her, and am better than the peasants she has known. She will forget me as soon as I am out of sight and she sees other cultivated men. A love that springs into existence and attains its growth so quickly cannot endure; it is like the ephemera whose little life begins and ends with the sunshine of a day; let it finish so.'

He told me that, if I needed him, I was to send a telegram to Dover. That shows that he has not any voyage to make in his ship. And why should he stay in Dover rather than in London? To spare me pain, as he thinks—that is why.

The more I loved him the more dreadful it would be to part from him, and of course we should have to part, unless we married. He has thought about that, I dare say, and perhaps he would not marry me on any consideration ; certainly not, knowing so little as he does of my character and disposition. He does not know that I shall love him for ever and ever. He does not know whether I am a simpleton or an over-clever person, and it is clear that he dislikes both characters. He seems to hate society ; he may think that it will please me, and that I could not be happy to live in the only way which pleases him. He cannot know with any feeling of certainty whether I have patience, or amiability, or fidelity, or truth, or any of the virtues that are necessary to make a good wife. Perhaps he has no wish to marry anybody, but

prefers to live a bachelor, and go sailing about carelessly in his ship, without any of those anxieties which one must feel who has a wife and loves her. Yet I feel sure he loves me ; for his kind eyes seemed to reflect just the feelings that were in my heart when I looked in them ; and when I kissed him he was not irritated, but kissed me again. Without love, could he be so considerate for my happiness ? Would he not be careless or indifferent ? Oh, I am sure he loves me ! And if he sees that I am not very silly, and that I am doing all I can to be reasonable and good, and that my love for him only grows with time, can he cease to love me ? Then, again, if he continues to love me, is it not fair to suppose that he will desire to have me with him always ? I do not think I am unreasonable or carried away by impulse in thinking this ; and

whatever arguments I can find against my hopes I have considered fairly, yet still my hope exists and swells my heart with joy.

I have been thinking what I may do to be wiser and worthier of his love. I certainly shall not attempt to learn the piano, though I have had a great wish to do so, and it has seemed to me that music, even such as an untalented girl may with patience learn to play, would be very pleasant as a resource when other amusements fail; nor do I think I shall try to paint pictures, because I have no natural talent for that art, and, unless one can paint very well indeed, it is but a selfish source of pleasure; but I shall set myself to learn German and Italian, so that, if ever the day comes when we go abroad together, he shall not be forced to regret my ignorance.

It has just occurred to me that this is a very odd way of keeping a diary. In all that I have written to-night there is not one line of what I have been doing during the day ; but indeed the events of the day seem so unimportant beside the first event of my life that I find it difficult to fix my thoughts upon them for five minutes at a time.

After luncheon, I sent for a cab to take me to Camden Square. The manageress asked me if I would have 'a young person' go with me ; but I declined, for I never felt more light-hearted and courageous, and, had I only known my way, I would have walked to Mrs. Gower's house just to prove to myself that I was no longer the helpless little simpleton I had been. No, I was no longer a child ; and, with that thought, as I leant back in the cab, a cloud of warm and radiant fancies of the most volatile and

gassy kind came into my mind, of which all I have written that is most hopeful and brightest is, as it were, but the cold distillation. The rapid drive helped to exhilarate me and make my brain giddy. I am rather ashamed now to think how confident and self-important I felt as I threw back the rattling doors and stepped on to the pavement. I think I told the driver in a very haughty tone of voice to wait for me ; I am sure that I was gratified by the silent respect with which he touched his hat.

Gauntly House is one of a row of splendid houses with stone porticoes ; the others are numbered, and nameless, but 'Gauntly House' is written on the two gate-posts of Gauntly House—for the convenience of cab-drivers, I suppose. There are very handsome curtains to the windows, and in one hangs a cockatoo in faïence. There are two bells, with brass handles that

might be gold, with little plates underneath, telling which is for servants and which is for visitors ; and there is a large handsome knocker on the door as well. I concluded from these observations that Mr. and Mrs. Gower were very solicitous for the convenience of people coming to their house, and very grand also. I wished, though, there had been another plate to say whether I should knock or ring.

The inside of the house was just as stately as the outside. I passed through a small kind of vestibule, where there were two chairs and a table, a barometer for people sitting there to amuse themselves with, and a stag's head by way of ornament, which recalled the British Museum to my mind, it looked so very lifeless and sad. I was shown into the room where hung the faïence cockatoo, and there I waited, wondering why that cockatoo was hung in the

window, until Mrs. Gower came into the room. I knew her directly ; she is so in character with her house, so dignified and stately ; there is no sort of nonsense about her. I can almost believe that had I, for the first time, seen her looking out of the window with the cockatoo, I might, after being deceived by the first glance at the bird, have doubted for a moment whether the woman was not of faïence also.

‘ You are the young person who advertised in the *Times*, I suppose ? ’ she said, in a freezing tone of voice.

‘ Yes. My name is Gertrude Graham.’

‘ I asked, because it is very unusual for young persons seeking a situation as governess to go about in hansom cabs.’

‘ I didn’t know there was a special vehicle for governesses,’ I said.

‘ You do not pretend to be facetious,

Miss Graham, I hope ?' she said, looking harder and more severe than ever.

'Oh no, indeed!' I should as soon have thought of joking with one of the mummies in the Egyptian department ; but I did not say so, of course. 'I shall be very grateful if you will tell me how I ought to have come here.'

'A four-wheeled cab would be more appropriate to a young person in your position.'

'Thank you. I was told they were for people who couldn't get into hansoms. I have been in London only a short time.'

'You are staying at an hotel. Have you no friends in London?'

'None. I hope you do not disapprove of my staying in an hotel?'

'No. Perhaps, having no friends and knowing nothing of London, you did well to go to one of the best, if your means allow

you to. You have chosen certainly one of the most expensive.'

'I have made no inquiry as to the price I am to pay.'

Mrs. Gower looked at me in silence for a few moments, with an expression that seemed to imply that I was the most singular young woman she had ever had to do with ; and then—

'You have been in a situation before ?' she asked.

'No. I have lived with my father all my life in France. He was a student, an author, a writer of great books. When he died, I was left without a single parent. I came to London to sell the "Dictionary" he had taken many years to write, and which he believed would provide me with a competency. But for various reasons the publishers decline to buy the work. That obliges me to earn my living. I am more

capable of teaching French than of doing anything else well ; that is why I have come to you. Now I have told you all that I can tell you. If you wish to know more, I will give you the address of some families in France who have known me since my infancy, and also of Monsieur le Curé.'

I saw the immediate advantage of following John Brown's advice. It put a stop to a line of questioning which seemed to me rather impertinent. Mrs. Gower found nothing to say, but sat looking at me with a kind of forlorn haughtiness in silence for a minute or so.

'I am afraid, by your reference to the Curé, that you are a Roman Catholic,' she said.

'No. Papa refused to let me take any of the sacraments, thinking it wrong for young people with immatured judgment to pledge themselves to a faith which wiser and older persons were not agreed upon.'

Mrs. Gower tapped her knuckles with her pince-nez reflectively, and presently said :

‘ Being the daughter of a literary man, and having lived in France all your life, you should be a mistress of both the English and French languages ; but, at the same time, I should have preferred a young person of more experience—one who understands the routine of teaching, and whose acquaintance with the manners of English society would be a safeguard against her making those social errors which it is evident you are liable to fall into.’

I said nothing ; but I thought of Mère Lucas at market, who, before asking the price of the fowl or rabbit she wanted to buy, took care to represent that it was not of the kind she liked, and made a great pretence of not wishing to have it at all, in order that it might be offered to her at the lowest possible figure.

‘Young persons in your position also,’ she continued, ‘are inclined to be independent and unwilling to comply with the regulations of the house they enter as *employées*, under the impression that their former condition entitles them to special privileges.’

‘I hope to be independent and mindful of my duties at the same time.’

‘And what salary might you require?’

‘I really cannot say. I want enough to pay for my clothes; but I do not know how much they will cost.’

‘There is a very excellent work published showing how one can dress like a lady on five pounds a year. Living in the house and having no occasion to go out of it except with my children or me, you will be at no expense whatever beyond your clothing. Of course, as I said, there are many inconveniences to me in taking an inexperienced teacher, while to you the

advantages of obtaining a situation in my house are very considerable. I think, therefore, that if I offer you twelve pounds a year——’

‘Oh, that’s ample!’ I cried, astonished by her generosity.

‘Of course you cannot be teaching all day ; in your spare time you will have no objection to making yourself useful. My daughter Gwendoline is in very delicate health, and the doctor has prescribed exercise and amusement for her. I should wish you to take her for a walk every day up the Camden Road, talking to her in French upon the objects of interest that you encounter, so that she may obtain health and entertainment and instruction at the same time.’

‘I shall be glad to do everything I can for her good. Will there be only one child to teach ?’

‘Only one child of mine. The three daughters of Mr. Gower by his former marriage will require instruction. Their education has been extremely neglected, I regret to say. They are out at the present moment. Are you fond of needlework, Miss Graham?’

‘Yes.’

‘I have a dressmaker in the house occasionally, and, as we all are busy at that time, I should expect you to assist.’

I thought of what John Brown had said; but, as a little employment with the needle is pleasant at times, and Mrs. Gower had shown great generosity in the matter of payment, I saw no reason to make objections which I did not feel; and so, after a little more conversation of an unimportant kind, I left Mrs. Gower, who promised to write to me as soon as she had decided to accept my services or not.



CHAPTER XI.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE'S PUPILS.

JULY 10.—I sent a telegram to John Brown, telling him that Mrs. Gower has engaged me as teacher to the children, and that I am in the very best health and spirits. I have been anxious to let him know this.

July 11.—I am writing in my own little room at the top of Gauntly House; the cook sleeps in the next room.

I took care to come in a four-wheeled cab, and Mrs. Gower led me into the cockatoo-room and told me that her

husband was well acquainted with my father's writings, and that she had concluded to engage me upon that recommendation without writing to my acquaintances in Neufbourg, as she considered it her duty to take me from the hotel with as little delay as possible. She then acquainted me with certain rules of conduct she wished me to observe, and afterwards took me into the 'study,' where I was introduced to my new pupils. Gwendoline is a thin pallid child of ten or eleven years, with a languid irresponsible manner which may be the result of feeble health. Edith is sixteen, Beatrice is eighteen, and Maud is about my own age; all three are robust, fair, good-looking girls, with well-opened eyes and a frank, rather bold bearing. One was playing the piano, another was drawing with the aid of a stump and a large well-worn piece of india-rubber, and the third

was catechizing Gwendoline on the verb '*avoir*' when we entered the room. Only the moment before the door was open I heard nothing of the piano or the verb '*avoir*,' but a great confusion of sound, as though they were all chattering together.

I began to teach as soon as I came down from my room, under Mrs. Gower's direction, and the four girls were very attentive until their mamma was called away to entertain a visitor. The moment the door closed behind her, the three elder girls put down their books, and, gathering about me, began to talk, and all together, asking me more questions than ever I could reply to. Was I engaged?—that was the first. Were the young men in France nice? Did I like five-o'clock teas? Was I a flirt? Did I like Ouida's novels? Would I like them to get one from the library for me without ma knowing anything about it? Was I

awfully strict? Was I firm? Was I a teetotaler? Would I prefer to go to the theatre and see one of Gilbert's 'jolly' operas, or to the Albert Hall and sit out an oratorio? Did not I know what an oratorio was? Did not I feel glad I did not know what an oratorio was? Did I like dancing? Did not I think the redowa awfully nice? Would I like to learn the redowa when ma went out? Did not I like sitting on stairs and eating ices after dancing, and being awfully indiscreet? Should not I like to dance in a ball-room? Did not I think I should like it better than dancing in the open air under apple-trees, where there was a lurking horror in the shape of earwigs and long hairy caterpillars? Did Frenchmen talk much rubbish between the dances? Did not I think it absurd to sit beside an old lady, as I said was the custom at fêtes, and only be with

your partner just whilst the music was going? Did they never talk rubbish in compliments—and that sort of thing? Did I like compliments? Should not I like to have a ‘good long spoon’? These are only a tithe of the questions they asked; and all were so odd and confusing that I hardly knew how to reply, and in consequence gave one or two answers that made them ‘scream’ with laughter, as they said—especially when, in reply to that about the spoon, I told them I had no preference for long spoons, except when my coffee was served in a long glass, and that I liked short ones quite as well if they were not unpleasant to my lips. I can see now why they were so amused by this reply. However, my responses upon the whole seemed to give them a very good opinion of me, so that, at the end of twenty minutes, Edith had her arm round my

waist, and all three addressed me as 'dear.' Then, their confidence in me being fixed, their questions took a less personal form.

'What do you think of ma?' asked one.

'Ain't she monumental?' asked another.

'Ain't she quite too awfully awful?' asked the third.

'I say, Edith, do you know what I always think of, when I see ma walking along the street?'

'No. What?'

'A hearse-horse in a cheap funeral!'

At this there was a general peal of laughter, in which I could not help joining; for somehow their merriment was contagious, and there really was a kind of resemblance between the stately carriage and gloomy complexion of Mrs. Gower and the general look of a long-visaged black

horse I had seen the day before drawing a funeral-hearse.

‘I say, dear, have you heard anything yet about Lady Linton?’ asked Beatrice, when the laughter was over.

‘No. Who is Lady Linton?’

‘Ma’s daughter. Oh, you’ll hear enough about her! She’s our sister—very much removed, you know! Ma’s been married twice, like pa. Her first husband’s name was Gauntly. She’s done her best to canonize him on the gateposts. He was in a Government office——’

‘I wish he was in a Government office now, for pa’s sake.’

‘Yes, but not for ours. Pa wouldn’t be so nice to us, you know, if ma didn’t nag him so.’

‘Did ma read the Riot Act to you, dear, before she brought you up to us?’

‘Don’t interrupt like that, Maud—I’m

telling ducky all about Lady Linton;’ then, kissing me, Edith clasped my waist tighter, and, drawing me down upon a box that served as a receptacle for school-books, she continued :

‘ Well, when ma was Mrs. Gauntly, she had a daughter—Elgitha—good name, isn’t it ?’

‘ I wish I had her hair,’ remarked Beatrice. ‘ Oh, it is lovely !’

‘ I wish I had her figure—or, at any rate, one like it,’ said Maud.

‘ Oh, figures don’t count for much now !’ remarked Edith, who herself was very well formed. ‘ I would rather have her face than anything.’

‘ I’d rather be ten times plainer and uglier than I am !’ exclaimed Maud, who was neither plain nor ugly in the least. ‘ Ten times—rather than be as beautiful as Elgitha, if I had her disposition !’

‘ Oh, she’s hateful !’

‘ Poor pa ! Usen’t he to catch it between them !’

‘ So used we. She made our lives miserable—nasty deceitful thing ! Don’t you remember, Trix, when we were little tots, and pa was a widower, how she used to kiss us and make friends ? And she wasn’t more than fourteen then, a little hypocrite ! I believe she knew just as well as her mother that it would be to their advantage for pa to marry Mrs. Gauntly.’

‘ She’s a nasty thing ! I would believe anything against her. I know that, when her horrid ways made me feel spiteful, I used to pray that she might never marry anyone, and that all the gentlemen who used to come and make love to her would one day turn round and have nothing to do with her. But then, when she made

us more wretched, I altered my prayer, and asked that she might get married, in order that we should get rid of her!’

‘Well, ducky,’ said Edith, coming back from this digression to the subject she started with, ‘she married Sir Gilbert Linton ; and now she is Lady Linton.’

‘I wish he hadn’t married her,’ said Beatrice.

‘So do I. There might have been a chance for one of us,’ said Edith.

‘Oh, I’m not thinking about that ! It ain’t likely that anyone with a title will take us,’ said Maud. ‘We’re not handsome, and we’re not accomplished, and we’re not what ma calls “carriage young ladies.”’

‘Oh, and a good job too ! I hate stuck-up people ; don’t you, dear ?’—this to me.

Before I could reply that I didn’t quite

understand what 'stuck-up people' were, Maud continued :

'I'm just as sorry on his account as our own. Look how nice he was before he married, and see how dull and sour he is now !'

'I think all men are nicer before they marry than after,' said Edith.

'Ah, but he wouldn't have altered so if he had married a nice amiable girl—a really good girl, you know, with no nasty secrets ! I wish one of us had found enough courage just to tell him what we knew about her before the marriage. It was a bad return for all his kindness to us to see him deceived without attempting to save him.'

'Oh, it's all very well, Trix ; but what girl could do that ? 'Sides, he wouldn't have believed us, he was so over head-and-ears in love ; and, if he hadn't attributed

our action to jealousy, don't you think ma and Elgitha would have been sharp enough to explain things their own way, and cheat him after all ?'

'It was cowardly of us, all the same, and cowardly of pa too. He knew all about it. I don't think Gilbert has ever forgiven us or him for our want of courage ; he can't help despising us. He never comes to see us, ducky,' Maud continued, turning again to me. 'And once he used always to be taking one or another of us out ; and, when we meet by accident, he always makes some sarcastic remark that stings just like a cut with a piece of whale-bone.'

'He never forgets our birthdays, though.'

'No ; but I'd rather by half—rather a hundred times that he'd just come and give me a good kind kiss, instead of sending a present with "affectionate remembrances."

There's a kind of reproach in that—at any rate, I feel it so.'

'Doesn't he hate ma!'

'Of course he does ; she's too much part of her beloved daughter to be lovable or even likable ! I believe he's as good as forbidden ma to go to the Abbey when he's there. She never goes till the day after she's received a letter from Elgitha. Haven't you noticed that ?'

'Yes ; and I wish she got a letter every other day.'

At this moment the door opened sharply, but noiselessly ; and the maid, putting her head in the room, made some movement with her lips, withdrew, and closed the door as suddenly and quietly as she had opened it.

'Ma's coming up,' whispered Edith, disengaging her arm from my waist. And the three girls hurriedly took their places at

the table and began to find their places in the books they had thrown aside.

The behaviour of the three step-daughters of Mrs. Gower had not surprised me so much as that of her own child, Gwendoline. This frail little creature took no part in the conversation, but, with her book upon her knees, sat by the corner of the table, listening with perfect composure to the vilification of her mother and sister. There was something to my mind exceedingly pathetic in the child's apathy, for it proved that she received less kindness from her own mother than from her step-sisters. But there was another explanation of her quiescence, for, while I was resuming my efforts to show the proper French pronunciation of the phrase, 'I have the grey goose of my uncle's friend,' the question was rapidly whispered from one sister to the other, 'Who has the chocolate?' and the sweetmeat being at

length discovered in Maud's pocket, a piece was passed quickly under the table into little Gwendoline's expectant hand.

In the afternoon I took the child for a walk in the Camden Road ; and, according to my instructions, I sought to amuse her by telling her the French names for the objects of interest there. But the Camden Road has so few interesting objects, and Gwendoline seemed so entirely indifferent to their names, either French or English, that I gave up the attempt in despair, and, at the risk of incurring Mrs. Gower's censure, proceeded to tell her in English the story of *Riquette à la Houpe*, which so enlivened her that she would not consent to go home until the tale was ended. When Mrs. Gower asked her if she had enjoyed her walk, she replied, without the slightest hesitancy :

‘ Yes, mamma ; Miss Graham has been talking French to me all the time.’

Here was a trial of conscience ! For a moment the falsehood, coming from those young lips, quite confounded me ; the next I felt inclined to correct this statement ; but, reflecting that the child would probably be punished for her untruth, and that punishment would possibly make her more careful in future deceit, I resolved to correct the child as best I might when we were alone.

I dined with Gwendoline in the study, and did not see Mr. Gower until I took her into the drawing-room to bid him good-night, when, to my great astonishment, I perceived that he was the very gentleman who had followed John Brown from the bank and shaken hands with him in parting—at least, I feel sure it must be he, for he is short and stout, with grey hair and a fat red shaven face ; and he wears very stiff white collars that prevent him from moving his head without his body, and a very glossy suit of

black cloth. Moreover, I learnt from Edith that her papa was the manager of a branch bank—and it was certainly outside a bank of some sort that I saw just such a little gentleman. It is not at all unlikely that John Brown, after putting that advertisement in the *Times*, spoke to his friend about it, and that he has had something to do with my engagement. I remember, when the letter was given me at the hotel, John Brown asked, in a tone of irritation, if there was no more than that one. But clearly, if this is John Brown's friend, and I have procured my engagement through his agency, it is without the knowledge of Mrs. Gower, and in some sort a secret, or Mr. Gower would not have spoken to me as if he had never in his life heard of my existence.



CHAPTER XII.

THE DIARY.—‘WHEN THE CAT’S AWAY.’

JULY 12.—I took the occasion of our being alone this afternoon to talk seriously to Gwendoline concerning her falsehood. She listened with as much surprise as is possible to her apathetic nature, but made no reply ; she seemed to be reflecting on what I had said like a grave little old woman. When I began to give her the French words for ‘carts,’ ‘children,’ and the like, she asked me to tell her a story, as I had done yesterday. I promised to do this only on condition

that, when she got home, she should tell the truth. She nodded her head, and I narrated the history of Jean Pouce, bringing it to a conclusion when it was time to return to Gauntly House. Some time afterwards Mrs. Gower called me into the drawing-room, and said :

‘ I find, Miss Graham, that, instead of amusing and instructing Gwendoline in the way I directed, you have chosen to do so upon a plan of your own. I do not find fault with that method, for my child evidently has profited more by the lesson of to-day than that of yesterday. She remembers perfectly the French words and phrases you introduced into your story and explained to her, whereas she could recall to memory none of the terms you used yesterday. What I object to is that you were secret in this matter. Had you proposed your scheme to me, I should doubtless have

assented to it. You are young and inexperienced, and I readily look over this fault. But I wish you to understand that I abhor anything in the form of deception, and pride myself on keeping my family free from that vice. Nothing escapes me in this house ; for, though my sweet Gwendoline is neither treacherous nor inclined to tell tales, she, from a sense of duty, informs me of any proceeding which shows a want of respect to me. Mr. Gower's daughters, I regret to say, from early associations and a want of proper education, have acquired tastes and a mode of expression highly objectionable, which I am endeavouring to correct. Not a vulgar word, not an inelegant gesture made in my absence, escapes my knowledge. Gwendoline acquaints me with everything. I tell you this that you may be more guarded in your future conduct. That is all I have to say. Do not reply, if you please.'

To-night, soon after I had come up to my room, the door opened, and the three sisters came in—to have a chat with me, they said. There being but one chair in my little room, Edith sat on my box, and Beatrice beside me on the bed, Maud on the chair in a line with the door. Holding up her hand, she showed me a piece of black cotton tied round her finger.

‘Gweny’s got the other end; she’s on the landing below looking over the balusters, and if she sees ma coming out of the drawing-room, she’ll give a pull; so there’s no danger, and we can have a good long gossip.’

I told them of my interview with Mrs. Gower, and of Gwendoline’s behaviour.

‘Oh, that’s Gweny all over!’ said Beatrice. ‘She’s the artfullest little imp that ever lived! We three put together haven’t as much cunning as she has in her

little finger. If we want to get out of a scrape, we have only to appeal to her ingenuity. I'll be bound it would never have occurred to you to defend your own kindness to her as she has done. If you had said you did it to please the child, Mrs. G. would have told you that she was the best judge of what was right for her daughter, and forbidden you to tell her any more fairy-tales. The child knew that, and, wanting to hear more tales, stored up in her fertile little brain all the words of French you perhaps told her without serious intention. Oh, she is deep!

'There's not a day that she doesn't tell her mother something about us, but never anything that would cut off her chocolate or make us keep secrets from her.'

'Isn't she just like Elgitha? Don't you remember, Trix, how she used to

cheat her mother in the same way, when she wanted to be good friends with us?

‘Yes, right up to the time you quarrelled with her and let out the secret.’

‘And nicely she served us all out for it afterwards!’

‘Gweny’s just the same. You see; one of these days, when the truth comes out, she’ll go over to her mother’s side and find some means of humiliating us and making our lives wretched, exactly as her sister did.’

‘Surely,’ I said, ‘a child of eleven cannot be so wicked as you suggest?’

‘But she is; it is in her nature. I don’t believe all that stuff about children being angels. I think they may be just as good and simple, or as wicked and designing, as older people. If people are pure and spotless the first part of their life, why should they be incurably bad the latter

part? Do you think anything would make you suddenly a scheming, designing, sly hypocrite, ducky?

'I can't tell,' said I. 'I only know that it seems very shocking to think that a child has no option but to grow up a bad deceitful woman.'

We were all silent for a minute or two, and then Beatrice, speaking with her loud, frank voice, and pouting out her lips with an air of decision, said :

'I don't know. Ducky's right, and so's Maud, I think. I don't pretend to be a philosopher ; but I'll tell you what I think about Gwenny and children like her—they've got too much head and too little heart to be anything like ducky here.'

'That's not much of a compliment to ducky's head.'

'Never mind that ; ducky doesn't want to be flattered. If I meant anything uncom-

plimentary, I shouldn't say it so openly perhaps. What I mean is this. If a child has a tender heart, she won't do anything to hurt anyone willingly. Gwenny has no heart at all. It's only aches that make her cry. When we were all crying our eyes out over poor little Punch—that's our dear little dog, ducky, that was run over—Gwenny only asked if she might have his skin for a muff. She doesn't care for anything but chocolate and fairy-tales, and she'll do anything to get them. But look at her ingenuity and imagination! She'll give you a long account of something that happened in the street, with the minutest circumstances; and you couldn't detect that it was all a make-up if you weren't told that she had never been in that street at all, or seen anything of the kind she's been talking about. I don't call it wicked for a child like that to tell falsehoods, because

she may do it without any wicked intention whatever. I believe Gwenny will be a clever woman, and that a really clever woman must have in her childhood certain peculiarities quite unlike those of ordinary women—such as we shall be. I think circumstances have a great deal to do with what people become, and I believe that, under good conditions, Gwenny might become a brilliant and admired woman, and under others, just such a woman as Elgitha.'

'In that case,' said I, 'you oughtn't to bribe her to deceive her mother.'

'Oh,' cried Maud, 'that's the best thing she can do!'

'Don't, Maud,' remonstrated Beatrice; 'ducky's not laughing.'

'I'm not joking,' replied Maud. 'If we did all our plotting in bed, with our heads all together under the blankets, what good

would that do to Gwenny? She'd creep up in the dark, or hide under the bed, or resort to some treachery more ingenious than I could think of, to find out what we were doing, and then she would repeat what she knew to her mother for what gain that would bring her. Do you think that would improve her character?

We talked upon this subject until the cotton was pulled, and the three girls, after kissing me affectionately, slipped downstairs with their shoes in their hands. And, though I have considered the subject since, I can find no argument to upset Maud's theory concerning Gwendoline. But, as regards myself, I feel that I ought to tell Mrs. Gower all I know, though doubtless that would result in my discharge and make the girls no better; and then, again, I can hardly think that Mrs. Gower's elder daughters are more faulty than other girls;

they are quite truthful amongst themselves, and very amiable and good-hearted, so I might never be able to keep a situation at all if I acted quite strictly upon principle. Oh, I wish I had some wise guide to direct me in this matter! I wonder what *he* would advise me to do? If I could only ask him! I almost hoped he would write a few words to me. Three days have passed since I sent him that message by telegraph, and I have received no letter, and despair of getting one. Perhaps it is best that I should master my difficulties alone. He will certainly respect me more if I do; that is some consolation.

July 18.—I told the girls to-night that, unless they could come up to my room with their shoes on their feet, I would rather they did not come at all, and I protested as forcibly and reasonably as I could against their doing things secretly

which they ought to do openly or not at all.

‘Oh, you know well enough ma wouldn’t let us come up if she knew it!’ said Maud, ‘and we *will* come and see you at night. It’s the only time we can talk without reserve, and you’re the only nice person in the house. You’re the dearest darling that ever lived, ducky!’ and with that she began to kiss me.

‘But don’t you see that you are making me a party to your deception, and that it is unfair to place me in a position that I dislike very much?’

‘Oh, you must put up with that, for our sakes!’ said Edith, who had seated herself on the other side of me, and had her head pillowed upon my shoulder.

They laughed at this; but, seeing that I would not yield and looked grave, Beatrice said:

'It isn't fair to ducky, that's true. She's too nice to tell of us, and it's horrid mean to take advantage of her kindness in that way! If she says we're not to come up, we must make up our minds not to come.'

'Oh, I'm sick of making good resolutions!' said Maud. 'We never can keep them.'

'They only make you want all the more to do wrong,' said Edith. 'I only see one way in which ducky can keep us from coming up to see her, and that is to come downstairs and see us.'

This set them all laughing again.

'I suppose we appear awfully mean and cowardly to you, ducky?' Beatrice said. 'We're such hardened reprobates that we're scarcely conscious of our own vices. It isn't nice to be mean; but what can we do? What's the good of breaking out into open

rebellion? We are sure to get the worst of it. You see what ma is; she could make life unendurable to us if she liked to. There's no one to help us. Pa's just as weak as we are, and just as much afraid of ma.'

This is quite true. He is afraid to look at me or speak to me in Mrs. Gower's presence. Yet, if we meet by accident when she is away, he nods and smiles most pleasantly, and has even gone so far as to say, in a very low voice and rapidly, as though he were afraid of being overheard or not getting the words out before the appearance of his wife, that the weather is very warm for the time of year. Yesterday morning we met on the stairs, and he shook hands as he murmured in a low voice, 'How do you do, my dear?' But this morning, when he came into the study with Mrs. Gower to bid his daughters good-bye,

he only made me a smileless little bow, though he had not seen me before. I am resolved that, when next he offers me his hand, I will quietly refuse to take it.

I am sure he is in league with his daughters. They have surreptitious meetings, at which there is always a great deal of talking and giggling—for naturally he is, I think, a merry little man—and much hugging, to the detriment of his wonderful shirt-collars and cravats, which his daughters are always careful to straighten out and arrange afterwards. Yesterday there was consternation in the study upon Edith producing a small packet, and whispering in a tone of terror, 'Pa's gone without his parsley!' And it was explained to me that, on the second and fourth Monday in each month, Mr. Gower attends a general meeting which keeps him from home until a late hour; and that on these occasions he in-

variably provides himself with a small quantity of parsley to eat on his way home, that Mrs. Gower may not discover he has been smoking.

August 7.—I think I am growing callous, like the girls. Looking back to my last entry, I am humiliated to think how speedily my scruples have forsaken me. Far from forbidding the girls to visit me clandestinely in my room, I look forward to their coming with feelings of pleasure ; and I believe that it would grieve me more than it would them to be deprived of the stolen meeting. I did not think I should miss my liberty so much, or find the services of a teacher so difficult to perform. The mechanical regularity with which everything in this house is done, the absence of variety, the restrictions put upon one's most harmless impulses, the monotony of life, is so different to all that I have been

accustomed to that I seem crushed and stifled. The heat oppresses me ; the least rebuke from Mrs. Gower weighs upon my mind. I am ill and sick at heart, struggling under a burden that I am not strong enough to carry. Oh for a day's liberty among the rocks and streams of Neufbourg ! Oh for one hour upon the sea ! He knew me better than I knew myself. He saw that I was only a weak, foolish girl, not brave enough to be the wife of a strong determined man, with no power to face the hardships which give a zest to his life. And he did the best he could for me, and went his way. I shall never see him again ; I feel sure of that. And now I begin to see what a fool I was to flatter myself with hopes, and how wildly impossible those hopes were. I suppose it is the knowledge that I shall see him no more that makes me cling so closely to the girls. They are all in all to me now. I

think of them when I awake. I dress quickly that I may go down and meet them. I am loath to let them go from me at night-time. I cannot live without loving some one. Yet it is not many weeks since we parted. He might yet write to me. Who knows but that one day he will drive up to the house and ask for me? Oh, I must not write thus—I must not think of that!

August 8.—This morning, while Mrs. Gower was scolding the new cook, I went into the breakfast-room and found Mr. Gower alone. We have long been good friends. I stood upon my dignity two days, I think, and then it gave way. He shook hands with me, and said something about my looking less pale than usual—I hardly know what. This opportunity suggested a thought to my mind which brought the hot blood up into my face.

'Mr. Gower,' I said, in a low, faltering voice, 'will you tell me, please, if you have seen Mr. Brown lately—Mr. John Brown?'

'Which Mr. John Brown?' he asked. 'There's such a lot of 'em.'

'John Brown whom you shook hands with outside the bank a few days before I came here.'

He looked down at his boots, and drew his chin once or twice between his thumb and forefinger before he spoke.

'John Brown—John Brown!' he said reflectively; then, raising his head, he added, looking at me with his twinkling grey eyes, somewhat evasively, 'Upon my soul, I don't remember shaking hands with anyone of that name!'

August 13.—We are going into the country for a month! The girls brought the joyful news to me when they came up

to-night, and we have indulged our fancies in the maddest, hopefullest schemes for this real holiday. Mrs. Gower is going to-morrow to see her daughter, and make inquiries respecting a house at Great Marlow, which, I find on the map, is situated upon the Thames, and not very far from Monkden Abbey, where Lady Linton lives. But what makes the prospect of going there enchanting to me is that Marlow is not a great distance from Pangbourne, where I spent the happiest hours in all my life. Oh, if I can only go there and look at the dear little inn, and the window where we stood looking in each other's eyes that morning! The girls hope that Mrs. Gower will not find a house; they want to go to the seaside.

‘Ah, you do not know how beautiful the Thames is!’ I said, forgetting my secret.

'Do you?' asked Maud quickly.

'I—I went one day before I came here.'

'Oh, you deep, quiet, sly little ducky! You've never said a word about it!'

'Look at ducky's cheeks! Oh, you naughty ducky!'

'Well, it's no secret now! I suppose we can speak about it before mamma?'

At this I started up, and the blood left my face. They all laughed.

'I knew it!' cried Edith, clapping her hands. 'I told you so! I was sure such a dear, loving, pretty girl must have a sweet heart! I've seen how you start when the postman knocks at the door. You are expecting a letter!'

Expecting a letter! Oh, that brought me back to my senses, and made me feel how it would wring my heart to look upon the river without him! I covered my face with my hands to hide the cruel convulsion

of my face and the tears that started from my eyes. The girls were silent in a moment, and kissed my hands and brow, and soothed me with tender words of comfort and regret for the pain their inadvertency had given me.

August 15.—There is no one to teach this afternoon. Mr. Gower has taken his four daughters to a morning performance at the Gaiety Theatre. He invited me to go also, and the elder girls were unceasing in their endeavours to persuade me to be one of the party. I am sure they were really grieved by my refusal, assuring me that Gwenny would be equal to the occasion if Mrs. Gower made inquiries, and that there was no fear of the servants betraying the secret—for of course this expedition is to be kept secret. But, much as I wished to go, I felt that this was a load I dare not take upon my conscience, which is already heavily

weighted. Mrs. Gower had hardly left the house yesterday before the girls gave vent to their exuberant delight. Beatrice threw her book up in the air, with a scream of joy, as Gwenny reported from her post of observation behind the curtain that 'ma' was off, and, running to the piano, played a waltz which I had heard boys in the streets whistling, but which, or the like of which, I imagine, had never before been heard in Gauntly House ; after which she played and sang to the accompaniment, something about her being the 'Mash of a masher named Johnnie.' Where she learnt the words, or how, I cannot tell. Edith caught me by the waist and whisked me round the room almost faster than my feet could move ; and Maud did the same with Gwendoline, though not before the child had stipulated upon being paid in chocolate for her submission. Beatrice and Maud

both danced with me in turn, and declared I was the lightest and nicest little dancer that ever was. Then we all went into the drawing-room, and Edith pulled back the curtains and flung open the windows, which were always kept closed ; and we went out on to the little iron balcony to look out for 'pa,' who had gone with 'ma' to the railway-station.

Whenever anyone passed upon the pavement below, one or other of the girls would cough loudly ; and then they drew back and hid themselves, tittering and giggling like mad things because they had made the passer look up. I felt very much ashamed when, after being coughed at, a young man caught sight of one of us, and did nothing but walk up and down before the house, casting his eyes up at the open window, for the next half-hour. But the girls enjoyed it immensely, and, glancing at him through

the curtains, made remarks about his personal appearance quite loud enough to catch his ear, I thought.

When Mr. Gower came back, they all rushed downstairs, and, catching hold of him, danced him about the vestibule until, from laughing heartily, he became quite cross, as he lost his breath and saw his hat being kicked about on the floor.

'Look here—you know,' he cried; 'I ought to be at the bank! That's the only hat your ma's left out, and look at it!' Then, pulling his cravat, which had been hugged round under his ear, into its proper place, he added, 'Now I shall have to go upstairs and change my collar! It's stupid, Edith—it's dam stupid!'

At this they all exclaimed 'Oh!' in mock horror, and stood regarding him in silence as he brushed his hat tenderly with his sleeve. He tried to look cross; but

presently his shoulders shook, and he gave a short chuckle ; and then, assuming as serious a look as he could put on, when the girls burst into laughter, he said :

‘ Now look here ! You know, gals, there’s no time to lose ! What about dinner ? ’

‘ You’ll bring some one home with you, of course ? ’

‘ Yes. I shall look up Baskerville and Lawson and Hedges. ’

‘ And Tom Langham ? ’

‘ Oh, I booked him yesterday ! That makes five—just enough for loo. ’

‘ Oh, no cards ! ’ exclaimed the three girls, with one voice.

‘ You don’t suppose a set of married men want to be sitting about talking nonsense with you girls all the evening, do you ? A likely thing ! Cards at eight. You can look on till ten ; then off you go. ’

‘ Well, you’ll have to take us out to-morrow.’

‘ Where do you want to go ?’

‘ There’s a morning performance at the Gaiety—we want to go there ; and afterwards you must take us to dine somewhere.’

Mr. Gower made some strange noises with his teeth and tongue—a habit of his when Mrs. Gower was not at hand to correct him—and finally consented to their arrangement ; and, after some discussion as to the dinner, he kissed his girls, and me as well, and departed, promising to call upon the tradesmen and have the ‘ eatables and drinkables ’ sent home. And all the day there were preparations for the approaching feast. The excitement spread to the kitchen, as baskets of fish and game and poultry and fruit, and delicate vegetables and wines and spirits, arrived one after the other, and

were carried down by the girls to the larder. Never was such plenty seen below-stairs in their time! The cook, with her sleeves turned up over her elbows, went about her business scolding everyone; but it was clear she was as pleased as any. She reminded me of Mère Lucas preparing for the spring lessive. I looked on with fear and trembling, feeling like a peasant that has been drawn into a conspiracy to overthrow a state.

‘Five o’clock!’ exclaimed Edith. ‘It’s time we dressed. Come along, ducky.’

What was I to do? I suppose that question appeared in the expression of my face.

‘Of course you’re going to dine with us. No horrid old study to-day,’ said one.

‘I should think not. Why, you didn’t think we were going to leave you out?’

‘But——’ I faltered.

'Oh, rubbish! If you don't dine with the rest, I won't,' said Maud.

'Then both of you may starve before I will bring a single nice thing to you,' said Beatrice. 'Oh, come along, ducky! For heaven's sake don't be a goose!'

They hurried me upstairs and insisted upon my wearing a pair of silk stockings that were produced with others from a secret store which had escaped the piercing and far-seeing eyes of Mrs. Gower, and a pair of bracelets that their brother-in-law, Sir Gilbert Linton, had given Beatrice on her birthday. When I was dressed, and my hair arranged as Maud suggested, they made me stand at a little distance from them, and declared that I looked like a little princess, of that kind one reads of in story. Their compliments and praise quite turned my head; and from that time until the end of the evening I lost sight of every

scruple, and only thought of supporting the character they had given me by being as nice and agreeable as I possibly could be. The gentlemen were very attentive to me, and I think I managed to bear my part in conversation as brightly as one so little used to society might. Only, seeing that the attentions of Mr. Langham, the only unmarried gentleman in the room, made the sisters a little quiet and jealous, despite their sweet dispositions, I did my best to shake him off by saying as little as I possibly could in reply to his questions and observations. Mr. Gower made me sit beside him at dinner, and Dr. Baskerville sat on the other side of me, and we were exceedingly gay. Then the champagne corks flew out with a report just like the corks from old bottled cyder, and the laughter and noise grew louder and louder, when suddenly Beatrice, in the midst of a

reply, stopped quite short, and held up her finger with a look of terror, as if she had heard something. We were all silent in a moment. The girls looked at each other, biting their lower lips. Mr. Gower let his knife fall on the ground, and, with his hands hanging loose by his side, glanced from one daughter to the other in speechless inquiry. Beatrice rose and slipped out of the room.

'It was her knock!' whispered Edith across the table.

Mr. Gower's face, which had been very red indeed, was now a kind of slaty drab, beaded above the temples with drops of perspiration. He sat looking fixedly at the end door in silence, only the breath sounded like the escape of wind from a pair of broken bellows as it came up through his short throat. It seemed a long while as we sat there in terrible suspense. We heard the

bang of the street-door and the sound of a voice below, and, soon after, the folding-doors at the side opening, Beatrice entered silently and swiftly.

‘Ma!’ she exclaimed, under her breath. ‘She mustn’t come in here and see. Oh, pa dear, go outside and stop her. She’s coming up—she must be outside now!’

Mr. Gower gave a glance of frantic despair at the table piled with fruit and confections, and studded here and there with a champagne-bottle; then he looked at his children as a man might look upon his drowning family in the last extremity, and rose.

‘There’s no help for it,’ he muttered. ‘I’ll have it out with the old——’

He walked down the room with a determined step, and we were all watching him as he opened the door. Then the girls burst into a scream of laughter, for there in

the doorway Beatrice had hung the faïence cockatoo!

It was a rather cruel practical joke, and it was a long time before Mr. Gower could join in the general mirth. Every now and then he would shake his head abstractedly, and mutter, 'Damned cockatoo!' after which he invariably filled his glass with champagne and emptied it. I am sure he must have drunk more than a whole bottle. When the dinner was over, Edith brought a box of cigars; and Maud, having left the room for a minute, returned with an *épergne* full of parsley, which she set down before her father. They had no kind of respect for his paternal dignity, and he seemed to enjoy their jokes at his expense fully as much as they; and, though he at times appeared to be offended by their want of respect, his severity never lasted many minutes, and invariably ended in a shaking

of his broad shoulders and a little fat chuckle.

The card-table, which I had never seen used, was opened, and the gentlemen sat down to play, Mr. Gower producing two new packs of cards from his pockets. He showed himself so dexterous in using them, and so familiar with the game they played, that I imagine he must play cards at the 'board-meetings' he attends so regularly, especially as he referred to his 'confounded luck' last Monday, which was the day of the last meeting. A great deal of money changed hands ; and at one time Mr. Gower had to put into the pool—and it was swept into the pockets of his friends the next round—more than would have paid my salary for two years. When we were tired of watching the game, and almost suffocated with the smoke—for as soon as one cigar was burnt out they lit another—we girls went to bed,

it being decided by lot that I should sleep with Edith in her room. But we sat laughing and talking for more than an hour before the other girls went to their rooms, and then we did not see the last of them, for about five minutes afterwards Beatrice and Maud came giggling back to tell us that they had hidden Mr. Langham’s hat, and that we had better keep awake in order to see what a fine bit of fun it would be when he wanted to go home. Edith did her best to keep awake and to keep me awake also ; she talked almost without ceasing until the clock struck two, and she was still talking when I fell asleep. I woke with I know not what confused notions, hearing a loud knocking at the door.

‘Don’t move—don’t move,’ whispered Edith. ‘It’s pa. Pretend to snore.’

‘Edith! Don’t you hear me? Edith!’

cried Mr. Gower, shaking the handle, and kicking the door.

Edith snored, while I tried to make out what it all meant.

‘Where’s Tom’s hat?’ Edith! I’m not joking. Where’s Tom’s hat, Edith?’

Then I heard Mr. Langham’s voice calling up the stairs; and Mr. Gower, replying, cried:

‘Damn it all, Tom, don’t be a fool! That’s the only hat I’ve got! What am I to go to the bank in?’

Then we heard him hammering at Maud’s door, and calling her in vain, and then the same thing was repeated at Beatrice’s door, while between he kept expostulating with Mr. Langham below.

‘For Heaven’s sake don’t take that hat, Tom! What’s the good of yours? I can’t go to the bank in a billycock. Wait a moment. The girls know where it is, if I can only make ’em hear. Maud! Beatrice!

Edith! You've hid Tom's hat, and he's gone off with mine. Where is it? Quick! — and ———'—here two words which I do not think are proper to write here. 'This is no joke! I'm angry! It's stupid—it's damned stupid!'

Mr. Langham did take Mr. Gower's hat, and this morning the poor little gentleman was compelled to go off in the one Beatrice had hidden, to the exuberant mirth of his daughters, and the tittering of the servants, who were looking down from the landing on the stairs. Indeed, I myself could not keep a respectfully grave countenance, for it would be difficult to imagine a more ludicrous spectacle than he presented—a stumpy, stout gentleman, with a short throat, dressed in speckless and glossy black cloth, with immaculate linen and dark gloves, and a little round, grey felt hat perched on the top of his head, and so

much too small that, tilt it how he would, a rim of bald head would show beneath the narrow brim. He protested that he would not take the girls to the theatre ; but they did not for a moment believe him, and showed their faith in his forgiveness by being all ready to start for the theatre when he came in a bran-new hat to fetch them. The poor gentleman looks very yellow and unwell to-day. Beatrice said he drank too much last night, but I can hardly think that, for he was so thirsty this morning ; he drank three bottles of soda-water before breakfast. Oh, what a dreadful condition the drawing-room was in this morning, with cigar-ash and stumps of cigar everywhere, and an unpleasant smell of smoke which clings to the room, though the windows and doors have been kept wide open ! I fear Mrs. Gower is sure to smell it when she returns on Monday.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE DIARY.—GERTIE REBELS: THE CAUSE
THEREOF.

SEPTEMBER 10.—*Marlow*.—This has been what Edith calls a ‘Camden Square day,’ and the first of the kind happily since we left London. The rain kept us within doors all the morning, and, after luncheon, when the sun peeped out and encouraged us to hope for a walk, visitors arrived and stayed until the rain fell again and doomed us to confinement for the rest of the day. The visitors were Mrs. Robinson, her daughters,

and a friend whom she brought to introduce to Mrs. Gower, a rather nervous, excitable, 'gushing' lady, whose manner contrasted strongly with the sculptural deportment—I am falling into Edith's way of expressing ideas—of Mrs. Robinson's five daughters. Poor thing! She mistook me for a daughter of Mrs. Gower, and was on the point of embracing me after a warm compliment to my looks, when she was informed that I was only the French governess. It was quite amusing to see how confused she was, and how eager to apologize to Mrs. Gower for the mistake she had made. Mrs. Robinson, in common with most of Mrs. Gower's acquaintances, adopts a patronizing, somewhat contemptuous tone, in speaking to me, or in referring to anyone beneath herself in social standing. I think I rank a little higher than the housemaid and a little

lower than the butcher's wife. At a sign from Mrs. Gower I left the drawing-room and retired to the breakfast-parlour, where I sat reading and musing in solitude until the visitors had gone and the girls came to me.

‘Oh, aren't they horrid, those Robinson girls?’ exclaimed Beatrice in an undertone, for experience has taught them that the walls of this villa are dangerously thin.

‘Hateful! Only think of that eldest thing sitting down to the piano with her bonnet on to play! Who wanted to hear her?’

‘She only did it to show off.’

‘That's all fantasias are composed for, I believe,’ Beatrice observed in her emphatic way. ‘I'm not surprised that gentlemen slip out of the room as quickly as they can when they see a girl sit down before a piece of music with a flourishy cover. It's no wonder they never talk to us as if we were rational beings!’

They must think we have not a grain of sense, nor feeling either, to give so much time to learning a thing which no one on earth cares for !'

I thought of John Brown and his antipathies.

'Shouldn't think the Robinsons played anything but fantasias. I don't want to go to their picnic.'

'I don't know why they asked us. We're not at all in their way.'

'Oh, it's just for the sake of asking us before their friends how dear Lady Linton is, and whether we have been lately to Monkden Abbey! Haven't you noticed, ducky, how every single acquaintance that comes to see ma asks after Lady Linton, and talks about Monkden Abbey? What did Mrs. Robinson bring her friend for but just to drag Lady Linton and the Abbey into the conversation, and show that she

was on visiting terms with the mother-in-law of a baronet?’

‘I don’t see much advantage in that,’ said I.

‘But there is, you may be sure, in the miserable genteel little world we live in, where everyone is craving to be thought a little higher than she is.’

‘I suppose that sort of ambition is not confined to our set,’ said Beatrice. ‘Isn’t Jane downstairs always talking about her uncle who is captain of a penny steamer, and doesn’t that poor curate’s wife always lead the conversation up to her godfather, the Bishop of Tobago?’

‘I dare say Trix is right. But the meanness of our class of society does seem the meanest meanness of all. Just think what a lot of people ma knows! And there’s not one in the whole gang who cares twopence for her!’

‘I don’t see how they can. What is there in ma to like? She’s not witty and she’s not wise, and she doesn’t always give herself the trouble to be complaisant.’

‘And yet, for all that, people cling to her—pay formal visits, and sit talking about nothing at all, with an uncomfortable simper, by the hour together; and now and then go to the expense of giving a party, to the hearty disgust of everyone invited, for no purpose at all but to talk about Lady Linton’s mamma to their envious friends afterwards.’

‘That’s not all. You may be sure there’s a lot of talk about Elgitha that we never hear. People must wonder what’s the matter with her—why she never leaves the Abbey, and why Gilbert never receives visitors. Fancy how delighted anyone would be if she could pump a little information on that subject out of ma!’

‘She’d have reason to be proud of her own ability if she succeeded,’ said Maud drily.

‘What is the matter with Elgitha? Do you know, Gwenny?’ asked Edith.

Gwendoline, sitting with her elbows on her knees, and her sallow little face in her hands, shook her head. Behind Edith’s back the two elder girls glanced at each other in a significant manner, which I failed to comprehend; and then Beatrice, going to the window, changed the subject.

In the evening Mrs. Gower set the girls to prepare some lessons for to-morrow, and gave me some material to make up into a matinée for Gwendoline. I think we were all glad when the day came to an end; I, for my part, feeling in an ill-humour with Mrs. Gower and her friends, and things in general. I know not why, but this feeling of dissatisfaction is growing upon me. At

first I thought it resulted from change of habits ; and I believed it would pass away as I became accustomed to the restrictions of my position. I hoped also that learning Italian in my leisure would chase certain thoughts and memories from my mind, and that the change of scene and improvement in physical health resulting from a return to country life and pure air would restore my vivacity and strengthen my courage. But all my hopes and expectations are reversed. I am so reconciled to my condition as a teacher that I can think of no occupation I should prefer—indeed it would grieve me to separate from the girls who love me so well. My health is better ; I do not suffer from headache as I did in Camden Square ; I am strong. I sit down to Italian the moment I am free, and yet—oh, I am miserable!—an under-current of thought flows through my mind, and I cannot check it. Even while

the girls are reading and I am looking out for faults in pronunciation, my memory is filled with recollections. As I sew I repeat mechanically the Italian verb I am learning; but the measure of the words recalls the lapping of the little waves against the side of John Brown's ship.

I cannot forget, and the failure of my constant efforts is maddening in its persistency. I have taken the subject and fought with it like an enemy who will not be shunned. I have proved to myself that I was a fool to think John Brown would ever seek me out, or that he cared for me sufficiently to write to me; that every act of kindness on his part was unavoidable; that his nature is affectionate, but not passionate; that his conduct showed a strong desire not to fall in love with me; that, if he had the emotions and feelings of ordinary men, such as the girls are con-

tinually talking about, he would have taken advantage of my simplicity and ignorance, and ‘spooned awfully’ as long as ever he could, and with very little care for the result to me. No; it is not for want of looking at this matter fairly and reasoning it out freely that I still think of him. I know he does not love me. I know that, if we meet again, it will be by accident, and that he will have no deeper feeling for me than a kind of affectionate pity for my simplicity and a philanthropic hope that I may grow wiser. I know all this, and yet—yet I love him, and my heart is breaking with hopeless longing——

September 14.—I am to go with Mrs. Gower to the Abbey to-morrow. Mr. Gower will stay here until Tuesday, and proposes to take the girls for a row. He suggested in a timid faltering way that I should go with the girls, ‘to look after ’em a bit, you

know, my dear.' But Mrs. Gower, on my behalf, declined very coldly. I think she has some suspicion that her husband is kinder to me than she thinks one in my position deserves. Perhaps she suspects that, if she left me at home, the girls and Mr. Gower would take me out clandestinely—as they certainly intended to do—and so forces this honour of visiting Lady Linton upon me. Gwendoline may have found it necessary to warn her mamma of this in order to avert her suspicion from some greater danger. That seems more probable, as I learn that Mr. Langham and Dr. Baskerville are to meet the party, and that a luncheon with champagne is to be taken under the Quarry beeches.

September 17.—We went to Monkden Abbey in a closed carriage, Mrs. Gower and I. I remember that; and, now that I have started with a fact, others present

themselves through the mist that seems to have risen before my memory.

Monkden Abbey is a very beautiful old building in red brick, standing not far from the river, but screened from it by a long avenue of great oaks. A hill covered with firs rises behind it, forming a dark background that displays the outline of the building to great advantage. A thin line of smoke rising from one of the twisted chimneys looked a pale-blue by contrast with the dark-green of the firs. From the avenue of oaks the carriage-drive curves round to the chief entrance of the Abbey through a beautiful smooth lawn patched here and there with beds of brilliant geraniums and calceolarias. There is a fine flight of broad steps to the great door, which is in the centre of the building between the two short wings. It seemed to me that people must be very grand and

proud who lived in such a magnificent house ; and it was less strange that people should be proud to know the mother of the lady who owned it, albeit she was only, as Edith says, ‘the wife of a baronet ; and a baronet isn’t much.’

A servant came down to the carriage-door as we stopped, and, as he opened it, said respectfully, and yet in a tone that seemed to convey a warning :

‘ Sir Gilbert is not at home, madam.’

‘ I have come to see Lady Linton, not Sir Gilbert,’ replied Mrs. Gower haughtily.

‘ Sir Gilbert instructed me to say that no visitor except you was to see my lady.’

Mrs. Gower, without noticing this observation, made a sign to me to follow her, and ascended the steps. In the hall she pointed to an open door, and told me to go in the room and await her return ; then,

turning to the servant, she ordered him to conduct her to her daughter's room. I went into the room and waited there like a mouse, wondering at the magnificence of everything I saw. The only thing not grand in the room was a fishing-rod that lay on the table. I do not remember what I thought about, or how long I stayed there. A female servant brought me some luncheon, telling me that her ladyship had desired her to bring it to me, and asking if I would go upstairs and remove my things. I ate a little cold chicken, but not much, being greatly awed by the grandeur of everything, the silence, and the circumstances in which I found myself there. After eating, I dared to go to the window and peeped out. I could see the river shining like a stream of silver between the foliage of the roses. I looked at the lawn and the distant woods, and wished I could

go out and pluck some flowers from the beds and lose myself a little in the suggestive shade of the trees. Then I thought of Lady Linton, pitying her condition, which debarred her from enjoying the beautiful house and its surroundings. I know I wondered what was the cause of her illness, and whether her husband's cruelty had anything to do with it; for it was clear, by Mrs. Gower's manner, that he must in some way be responsible for her daughter's condition. Then I sat down in a great chair, musing on the strangeness of life, and reflecting that it was not only French governesses who were unhappy; and so I fell asleep, and fancied that I was lying in the hammock on board the *Tub*, and faintly I seemed to hear, as above my head, or in some distant part of the boat, the low deep voice of John Brown. I do not know how long

I slept, only, when I woke, my eyes falling on the table, I perceived that the fishing-rod was removed. Then I heard the sound of wheels on the drive, and Mrs. Gower's voice; and I rose, hastily arranging my bonnet. We got into the carriage and were driven away, Mrs. Gower sitting on the back seat and I opposite, on the front. Mrs. Gower said nothing, and presently, leaning back, closed her eyes; so I looked out of window and watched the Abbey receding from my view. We went along for some distance, and then came to a long wall that skirted the road. I kept my eyes fixed on that side, wondering what view would be revealed at the termination of the wall. The wall abutted upon a by-road, which ran at such an acute angle with that we were traversing, that by bending my head slowly to one side I could see along it for several seconds. That which made

me bend my head so was the sight of a man's figure, a man with his back to me, walking up that road. It was John Brown. I knew the figure at the very first glance, but for an instant I doubted my senses. Then I strained my eyes, while my heart beat wildly and my brain seemed to spin in my head. I leaned out of window as the vista narrowed with the movement of the carriage. At the last instant he turned, as if the sound of those wheels had reached his ears, and, though it was but for an instant that I saw his face, it was long enough to chase all doubt from my mind.

‘Stop!’ I cried to the driver, in wild excitement.

‘Miss Graham ! What is the matter ? Is there a wheel off ? Speak !’ cried Mrs. Gower, in alarm, as she was roused from her doze.

‘Stop, stop, stop!’ was all I could cry ;

and then I put out my arm to get at the handle.

‘What are you about, Miss Graham? Do you wish to kill yourself? Sit down this moment!’ Saying this, she caught hold of my arm, and being a strong, muscular woman, easily pushed me down into my seat.

‘I must get out; I must go at once!’ I cried. ‘Please let me go!’

‘What is the matter? Are you mad?’

‘It’s John Brown. It is my friend. I must go at once! Please let me go!’

‘I will hear of no such thing. Upon my word, Miss Graham, this is pretty behaviour for a governess! Go on again at once!’ she cried to the driver, who had pulled up his horse at my cry.

‘No, stop!’ I cried; ‘stop, or I will throw myself out of the window! Let me go!’ I exclaimed, turning upon Mrs. Gower in a

passion. 'I will go ! I am not your slave !'

'You are my servant, and, if you get out of this vehicle contrary to my orders, you shall not——'

I know not what else she said, or how she finished that sentence. I had shaken off her hand and forced open the door, and sprang into the road before she had ceased to speak ; and then, as fast as I could go, I sped back along the road and up the path where I had seen John Brown. He was no longer there ; but I ran on and on, hoping that, when I gained the brow of the hill that rose before me, I should catch sight of his figure again.

My heart sank like lead, and seemed to weigh down my trembling limbs as I caught sight of the empty road on reaching the hill-top. But still I ran on, with a desperate hope of overtaking him.

Not far down the road there was a clearing in the wood that bordered its side, and there quite suddenly I caught sight of him seated upon a fallen tree, lighting his pipe ; the sound of the match being struck drew my eyes in that direction. I turned towards him with a cry, and my arms spread out.

‘Great heavens!’ he exclaimed, dropping his pipe from his hand. And then he strode towards me and caught me in his arms, just in time to prevent me falling to the ground.

END OF VOL. I.

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